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AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF ASSYRIAN CHRISTIANITY

Christoph Baumer

The Church of the East

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‘Christoph Baumer has written a superb survey of a Christian community that once extended across large areas of Mesopotamia, Iran, the Persian Gulf, southern India, Central Asia, and China. This book is a major achievement, an insightful and meticulously researched survey of more than 2000 years of Christian history. The general public and scholars alike will benefit from its breadth and erudition.’

Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies

The Church of the East

An Illustrated History of Assyrian Christianity

New Edition

Christoph Baumer

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Foreword

From: Patriarchate
H.H. Mar Dinkha IV
Catholicos Patriarch
7201 North Ashland, Chicago, Illinois 60626
USA

9 December 2004

To: Dr. Christoph Baumer

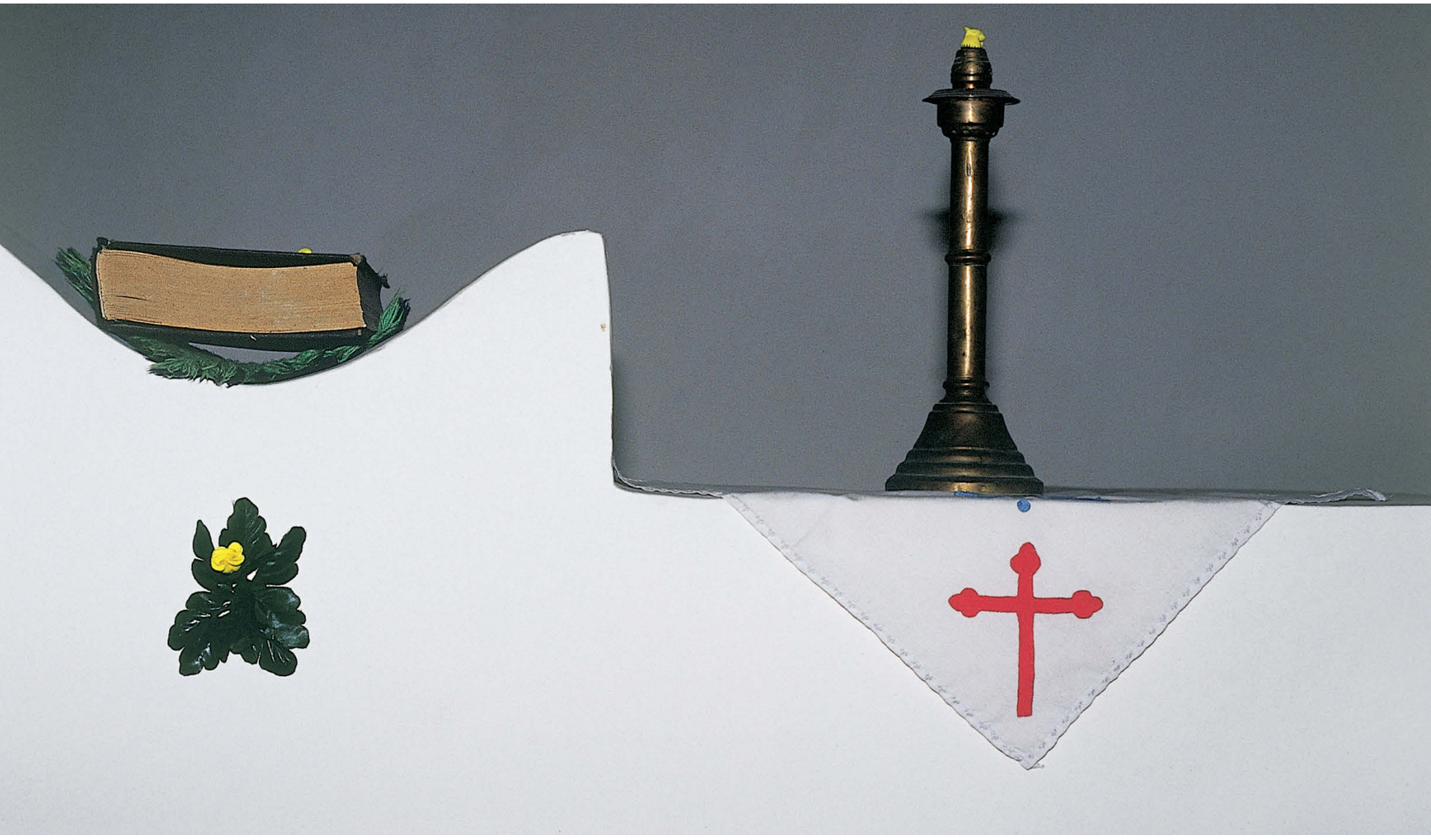
We are in receipt of your exhaustive work, and for the same our deepest appreciation is expressed here for the time you have taken, in love, for the Holy Church of the East; to write extensively on this ancient Apostolic Holy Church. May our worshipful Lord and Savior Jesus Christ bless you continually.

As Catholicos Patriarch I offer deepest thanks for the interest shown in composing this exhaustive labor of love for The Holy Church which in earlier times covered the whole Eastern World, from Seleucia-Ctesiphon to the Islands of Japan and to Java, present day Indonesia.

I offer my prayers and blessings upon you, and upon all those who seek to enlighten their knowledge in the history of this ancient Semitic Church of our Lord.

Unto God be all praise, glory and honor. Amen

Mar Dinkha IV
By Grace
Catholicos Patriarch of the East



Altar in the Nestorian Mar Zarya
Church in Göktepe, Urmiah, Iran.

Introduction

'The Word of God became flesh, so that in him humanity might be transformed into divinity and the nature of humanity renewed.'[1]

Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople (382–451)

'In the transformation of the spirit, the following occurs: the body mystically becomes subtle and takes the place of the soul, which takes the place of the intellect, which takes the place of the spirit, which goes to God, but further, the spirit truly becomes God, and the body, soul, and intellect, these serve it.'[2]

Rabban Yussuf Busnaya,
Nestorian mystic (869–979)

What is this 'Nestorian' Church of the East, whose namesake Nestorius never belonged to it, which produced an outstanding mysticism of great poetic power and which, almost a millennium ago, extended over a greater part of the globe than did the Roman Church?[3]

A first glance at the history of the Assyrian Church of the East

Today the Church, one of the oldest Christian communions of the world, numbers about 400,000 faithful, who struggle for survival in Iraq, Iran, north-eastern Syria, Western Europe and the USA. That it has been nearly forgotten in the West can be attributed not only to its small size but also to a Eurocentric bias in the historical record. Even the first Christian historian, Eusebius of Caesarea (265–339), in his ecclesiastical history, devoted scarcely a word to the Asian Christianity of Mesopotamia that had begun to develop rapidly in the second century. The reasons behind the lack of attention to the Church of the East grew out of the geopolitical situation of the time. In those days the River Euphrates, with its source in the north-east of modern Turkey and its mouth at Basra on the Persian Gulf, separated the Roman Empire from the Iranian Empire. Aside from isolated Roman advances towards the east and Iranian

The fortress of Zenobia, today called Halabija, on the western bank of the Euphrates, which formed the border between Rome and Iran. It was built by the queen of Palmyra, Zenobia (ruled 266–272), and converted into a border fortress by the Roman Empire in 273. The castle, which was reinforced by Emperor Justinian I (ruled 527–565), was destroyed by the Sassanian Chosrau II (ruled 590–628) in 610. With the Arab conquest of Mesopotamia, beginning in 637, the river and the fortress lost all strategic significance.

advances towards the west, the Euphrates stood as a stable national boundary, whose political impermeability was breached only by merchant caravans. These travelled along the ancient Silk Road, which linked China with Rome and the control of which created great wealth for Iran. The Silk Road crossed the Euphrates at two locations significant for the Church of the East: to the west of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the Iranian capital and see of the catholicos-patriarch; and to the west of Edessa, whose king, Abgar V Ukama (reigned 9–46), according to legend, corresponded with Jesus and where the first historically documented church stood.[4] The border at the Euphrates held fast for more than six centuries, rendered ineffective only in 636 with the victory of the Arab military commander Khalid ibn al-Walid over the Byzantines.

The impermeability of the Euphrates border had far-reaching consequences for the development of the Church of the East. In terms of organization, the Church of the East was forced in 424, on account of the great political enmity between Rome and Iran, to declare its juridical independence from the Western Church. With regard to theology, the deposition of Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus in 431, Emperor Zeno's Christological formula from 482 called the *Henoticon*, and the condemnation of the so-called *Three Chapters* in 553 led the Church of the East into the isolation of heresy. For its part, it formulated its own creed in 486,[5] emphasizing the absolute intactness of the divine as well as the human nature of Jesus. It reaffirmed the creed at

the bishops' synod of 612.[6] Only in 1994 and 1998 did the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of the East lift the anathemas (condemnations) they had declared against one another. As far as official dialogue with the Miaphysite Churches is concerned, it has foundered since 1998 on account of a precondition of the Coptic Church of Egypt, which demands as a prior concession that the Church of the East condemn Nestorius, an action the Church of the East finds unacceptable.

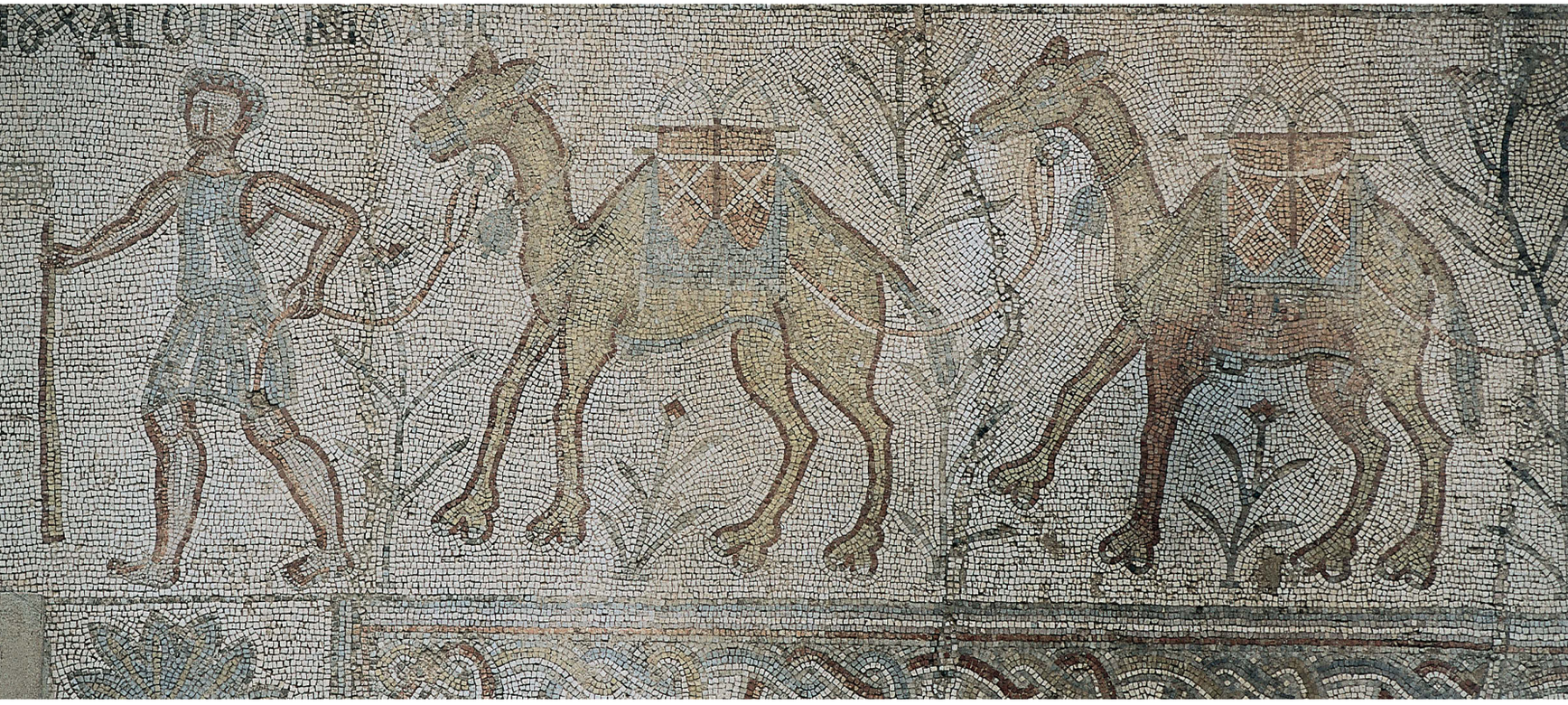
The struggle of that period over the 'true' creed and the nature(s) of Christ released such centrifugal forces that the Christian unity worked out at the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea in 325 and strengthened at the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople in 381 split into three autonomous Churches with their own creeds and hierarchies: first, the Roman imperial Church; second, the Miaphysite family of Churches, to which belonged the Egyptian Copts (united at the time with the Nubians), the Ethiopians, the Syrian Orthodox (also called Jacobites) and the Armenians; and, third, the Church of the East. The name 'Church of the East', found in the early sources, places it in relation to the other Churches. It lay to the east of the Roman Empire and its five patriarchates, Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.

The structure of the Roman imperial Church, laid out at Nicea, was, in fact, unstable, since there had never been a unified Christianity. Disagreements about the content of belief, ritual practice and membership in the Christian communion had already begun at the Apostolic Council (Council of Jerusalem) in 48, at which Paul, in the face of opposition from Jewish Christians, supported the freedom of Gentile Christians from observation of the Mosaic law of circumcision, after the followers of James, the Lord's brother, had stopped sharing a common table with uncircumcised Gentile Christians.[7] The history of Christianity is, from its infancy, a history of debate and division. And since religion permeated all dimensions of life, its history is also the history of politics, literature, scholarship, art and social relations.

As a further consequence of its role as a political and ecclesiastical border, the Euphrates also became a linguistic border. Following the ecclesiastical split between West and East Syrians in the fifth century, West Syriac and East Syriac dialects emerged from Syriac, as later the Serto script in the West and the Nestorian script in the East evolved from the originally shared Estrangela script. And so there developed along the Euphrates a fourfold border: political, dogmatic, ecclesiastical and linguistic.

Since the Church of the East was denied access to the West, it consequently oriented itself towards the East. While Bishop David of Basra initiated contact with the Indian Thomas Christians of Kerala around 295/300,[8] Nestorian monastic missionaries advanced into the Arabian Peninsula, as well as towards the peoples of the Central Asian steppes. After the loss of its Arab dioceses to Islam and a first setback in China, the Church made renewed efforts towards the east beginning in the eleventh century, and reached the Mongol peoples and the Middle Kingdom.

At that time, the authority of the patriarch of the Church of the East extended from the Euphrates to the Yellow Sea. Furthermore, due to the Arab conquest of the southern and eastern Mediterranean region in the seventh century, the Church of the East was able to cross the Euphrates to the west into the former Byzantine region.[9] According to a church history from the 1330s or 1340s and based on older documents, besides his own patriarchal metropolis, the following 27 archdioceses stood under the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. These were, in hierarchical order: Gondeshapur (Iran), 2; Nisibis (south-eastern Turkey), 3; Prat de Maishan (near Basra), 4; Mosul, 5; Arbela, 6; Kirkuk in Bet Garmai (all in Iraq), 7; Halwan (including



Mosaic of a camel caravan in Bosra, ancient Bostra, circa fifth/sixth centuries CE. This trading city, which was important until the Arab conquest in 634, was connected with both the Silk Road and the routes leading to Arabia. It was here that the young Mohammed was said to have been recognized as a future prophet by the Nestorian monk Bahira.[1]

Hamadan, Iran), 8; Jerusalem, 9; Edessa (today's Urfa in southern Turkey), 10; Rew Ardashir in Fars (Iran), 11; Merv in Khorassan (Turkmenistan), 12; Herat (Afghanistan), 13; Fatraba (Qatar), 14; China (possibly today's Beijing), 15; India, 16; Barda (in today's Azerbaijan), 17; Damascus, 18; Ray (near Teheran), 19; Tabaristan (northern Iran), 20; Dailam (on the Caspian Sea), 21; Samarqand, 22; Turkistan (Southern Kazakhstan?), 23; Halih (location unsure), 24; Sigistan (Seistan in south-western Afghanistan), 25; Khan Baliq (today's Beijing) or, much more probable, Jan Baliq (Beshbaliq north-east of Turfan in Xinjiang) and Alfaliq (Almalik in north-western Xinjiang, China), 26; Tangut (the provinces of Gansu und Ningxia and the Ordos region in China), 27; Kashgar and Nawakat (in western Xinjiang and in Kyrgyzstan), 28.[10] There were additionally the long-established metropolis of Atropatene (Iranian Azerbaijan)[11] and possibly, towards the end of the eighth century, a metropolitan see of Tibet.[12]

Even if these metropolitan sees were not always occupied and this 14th century list represents an accumulation over several centuries, it demonstrates the immense geographical expanse of the Church of the East, which greatly exceeded that of the Catholic Church. The 27 metropolitan sees oversaw some 200 dioceses, which contained approximately seven to eight million faithful. Thus around the tenth to fourteenth centuries between about 12 per cent and 16 per cent of the estimated fifty to sixty million Christians were Nestorians.[13] Until the start of the fourteenth century, the Church of the East was the most successful missionary Church in the world, and

it began to be surpassed only in the sixteenth century through the conversions, often forced, brought about by the Catholic colonial powers. This achievement is all the more remarkable since the Church of the East, in contrast to all other world religions, was never a state Church. It was often oppressed by state authorities, or at least discriminated against in favour of the state religion, sometimes benevolently tolerated, and seldom promoted. Such an accomplishment could only be made thanks to an inner fire, an inner missionary power, supported by an outstandingly well-organized and efficiently led hierarchy – to the extent that it was not hampered by internal conflicts.

Twice, both times shortly before a dynastic change, the Church stood poised to take the decisive step and become the state religion in Mesopotamia: first, after 628, when powerful Nestorian families participated in the revolt against Shah Chosrau II.[14] At that time presumably about half of the Mesopotamian populace was Christian. However, instead of a renewal of Christian leadership, there was anarchy. First, Chosrau's rebellious son and successor, Shiroi, apparently a secret Christian,[15] had the Nestorian leader Shamta crucified before the door of the Bet Narkos church in Seleucia-Ctesiphon,[16] and then, after he had had all of his own brothers murdered, he died without heirs after a reign of just nine months. There followed, in an atmosphere of chaos, eight kings and two queens upon the throne within only four years, so the weakened nation was unable to mount sufficient defence against the Arabs, who began attacking in 633. Thus the Nestorian Christians traded Zoroastrian sovereignty for Islamic, and, with Palestine and Syria, Christianity lost its own birthplace – just as, more than half a millennium later, would happen to Buddhism in northern India.

Six centuries later the prospect again arose in Iran that a ruling dynasty might join the Church of the East. In this case, five Il-Khans, as the Mongol rulers of Iran were known from their conquest in 1258, gave cause for justified hopes. For various reasons, however, these all fell through. Nevertheless, the mothers of two Il-Khans had them baptized with the name Nicholas by the Nestorian patriarch, but, when they came to power, both Ahmad (ruled 1282–1284) and Oljaitu (ruled 1304–1316) converted to Islam for political reasons and persecuted Christians.[17] Two other Il-Khans, Geikhatu (ruled 1291–1295) and Baidu (ruled 1295) – who, according to Bar Hebraeus,[18] was a secret Christian – were weak rulers and were overthrown.[19] Finally, Il-Khan Ghazan (ruled 1295–1304), who converted from Buddhism to Islam, offered the Western European rulers Pope Boniface VIII, King Edward I of England and James II of Aragon his conversion to Christianity in the case of a military alliance formed against the arch-enemy Egypt.[20]

But the age of the Crusades had passed and Acre, the last Christian bastion of Palestine, had fallen in 1291. In 1287 the kings Philip the Fair of France and Edward I of England had given the cold shoulder to Rabban Bar Sauma (†1294), the Nestorian special envoy of Il-Khan Arghun.[21] Even though the mission brought no results, it testifies to the international character of the Church of the East at that time that the Öngüt Rabban Bar Sauma, who had lived in a monastic cell south of today's Beijing, came to Baghdad and later travelled to Italy and France, becoming a kind of Asian Marco Polo in reverse.

In light of the lack of European interest in an anti-Islamic alliance, Ghazan remained Muslim. Thus the window of opportunity for a possible re-Christianization of the region that is today Iran and Iraq closed for ever. Instead of a revitalization of Mesopotamian and Iranian Christianity, the devastation of the fanatical Muslim Tamerlane (ruled 1370–1405) greatly intensified the destruction wrought by Ghazan and Oljaitu. After the loss of their churches and

monasteries, the surviving Nestorians sought refuge in the remote mountains of Kurdistan (in northern Iraq) and Hakkari (in south-eastern Turkey), for only in the shadows of rugged mountains can a persecuted spirit live on in freedom. And so the one-time 'Christian sea' of Mesopotamia and Iran was transformed into a small, inaccessible island, surrounded by the wide ocean of Islam.

Spiritual aspects

The Church of the East was great not only externally but also internally – above all in its spiritual, theological and intellectual dimensions. While the spirituality of the Church of the East produced such outstanding masters of Christian mysticism as Ephrem the Syrian (306–373), Isaac of Nineveh (†late seventh century), John of Dalyatha (†before 786) and Yussuf Busnaya (869–979), who influenced the Islamic mysticism of Al-Hallaj (858–922), Nestorian translators and scholars built the bridge linking the knowledge of classical antiquity with the European Middle Ages.

During the 'Age of the Translators' (sixth to ninth centuries), Nestorian and Jacobite physicians and scholars translated the Greek classics of philosophy, mathematics, geometry, medicine and astrology from Greek into Syriac and then into Arabic. The greatness of their reputation can be seen in the fact that Caliph al-Ma'mun (ruled 813–833) appointed the Nestorian philosopher and physician Yuhanna Ibn Massawah (†857) as head of the state library and university that had been founded in 832 and was called the 'House of Knowledge',[22] and paid in gold for the translations of the most renowned Nestorian scholar, Hunayn Ibn Ishaq (808–873).[23] Thanks to these translation projects, the Arab-Iranian culture preserved the treasures of Greek knowledge and, through the University of Toledo, offered them to Europe, which had lost them in the darkness of the early Middle Ages. Finally, the revival of Aristotle and the starting points of the work of Thomas Aquinas would have remained unthinkable without this Nestorian–Arab bridge.

The theological reflection of the Church of the East also followed its own creative paths, based on the works of the Church Fathers Diodore of Tarsus (†392) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (352–428). The two outstanding characteristics of Nestorian anthropology are logical consequences of its Dyophysite Christology, which emphasizes the human nature of Christ and his free will to fulfil the duties imposed on him by the Father. A peculiarity of this view is the consequent rejection of original sin and the conviction that the human person can violate divine law and turn away from God only out of free will. For Theodore, the root of sin lay not in the nature of the human person as such but rather in allowing human weakness to run its own course.[24] This view is diametrically opposed to the doctrine of original sin, as conceptualized by Augustine (354–430).[25] This was accepted by the Roman Catholic Church until the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and also influenced the doctrine of predestination of the Reformers, particularly that of Calvin.

The second distinctive feature of Nestorian anthropology derives from the first. Since human nature is essentially good and not, as Augustine believed, fundamentally bad,[26] the resurrection of Christ opened the door for the human person to the recovery of Adam's prelapsarian nature – that is, to a return to the goodness of his own nature. Human nature is fundamentally good but can, nevertheless, be corrupted by its weaknesses and led into error.[27] Continuing this life-affirming world-view was the theological vision of Isaac of Nineveh, who was convinced that God would bring all living things, including the greatest sinners and even demons, to perfection and bliss.[28]

Christian wedding in Baghdad, 1990s. The adorning of the bridal pair with money is said to bring happiness and prosperity – a tradition that may also be seen in other cultures of Asia, such as, for instance, those of China and India.

In the eighth/ninth centuries this optimistic anthropology of the Church of the East forged a surprising link with Taoism. The Nestorian hymn to the Trinity, written in Chinese in the late eighth century, praises Christ as follows: 'King of Eternal Life, lamb of mercy and joy; who suffered greatly, yet never quit to toil; who takes away the collected sins of all beings; so that our true nature well saved, no more peace to spoil'.[29] The religious dialogue that Nestorian monks engaged in with Buddhist and Taoist brothers belongs among the most fascinating aspects of the history of the Church of the East.

Even in its mountain refuge, the Church of the East was not spared the misfortunes of fate. In 1553 part of its clergy entered into union with Rome, forming the Chaldean Catholic Church, with its see at Baghdad, which today has about 650,000 members. Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century the Kurds carried out numerous massacres of Nestorians, culminating in 1915–1918 with the murder of about half of all the Nestorians and their patriarch Mar Shimun XIX – a genocide proportionally similar to the massacre of the Armenians.[30] The tide of refugees to the West swelled further in response to additional massacres in Iraq in 1933 and the first Gulf War, so that today about half the Nestorians live in exile in the West. Finally, in 1968, the so-called *Ancient Church of the East* split from the mother Church, creating a schism that persists to this day.

Patriarch Mar Dinkha (in office 1976–2015) has combined successful efforts to preserve the theological and cultural heritage with a policy of openness and a constructive dialogue with Rome, which marked its first great accomplishment in 1994 with the 'Common Christological Declaration'. The patriarch outlined this spirit of theological openness in a conversation with the author, stating: 'The oral apostolic succession, which began with the appearance of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, is continually updated. We must keep space in our minds and hearts open for revelation.'[31] This commitment to the continuation of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, which began in Mesopotamia with the Zoroastrians and Muslims, spread to China with Buddhism and Taoism and to India with Hinduism, and is now carried out with the Roman Catholic and Syrian-Orthodox Churches, gives reason for optimism that the Church of the East, drawing on its abundant treasury of wisdom and tradition, can give renewed momentum to spiritual life.

The term 'Nestorian'

The name 'Nestorian' is in nearly every church tainted with the odium of heresy, since Nestorius, his followers and his works were declared anathema in 431 at the Council of Ephesus. For this reason, Catholic missionaries and priests destroyed the books

of the 'Nestorians' wherever they found them. For instance, in 1599 the Catholic Inquisition forced an auto-da-fé of the collected archives, documents and manuscripts of the great Nestorian Church of Kerala,[32] and, around 1830, Catholic missionaries had thousands of ancient manuscripts and books from the library of Mosul thrown into the River Tigris.[33]

The expression 'Nestorian' is, in fact, incorrect on three levels. First, Nestorius, who was Patriarch of Constantinople from 428 to 431, neither founded the Church nor, second, ever worked in it. Third, its dogma is based not on the writings of Nestorius but rather on the works of Diodore of Tarsus and, above all, Theodore of Mopsuestia. Instead of 'Nestorian', it should be called 'Theodoran'. Additionally, if one considers that the pejorative term 'Nestorian', applied polemically to the East Syrians for the first time at the so-called 'Robber Synod' in Ephesus in 449,[34] implies the accusation that Nestorius spoke of two sons of God and thus of a fourfold divinity, one reaches the conclusion that Nestorius himself was no Nestorian! He always emphasized the ontological unity of the two natures of Christ and decisively defended himself until his death against this particular accusation.[35] In reality, his great opponent, Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria, deliberately falsified his views in a letter to the bishop of Rome.[36]

The Church of the East has always defended itself against the name 'Nestorian', although it honours Nestorius as one of its Church Fathers. The important theologian Mar Odisho, metropolitan of Nisibis and Armenia (†1318), argued that, while 'they [the Eastern Syriacs and Nestorius] held the same faith, Nestorius, then, followed them, and not they him'.[37] As the Anglo-Saxon missionaries of the nineteenth century discovered, the East Syrians called themselves Chaldeans, Syrians or Nazarenes.[38]

Officially, the Church calls itself the 'Holy Apostolic and Catholic Assyrian Church of the East'. It refers to itself as 'apostolic' because it traces its founding to the apostles Thomas, Addai, Aggai and Mari; 'catholic' because it is universally active; and, recently, 'Assyrian', to acknowledge the connection to its Assyrian homeland. The expression 'East Syrian Church' is likewise appropriate since it refers to the language and liturgy. The term 'Persian Church', however, is geographically incorrect, just as 'Nestorian Church' is dogmatically inaccurate. Nevertheless, for the sake of simplicity, 'Nestorians' and 'Nestorian' are used along with 'East Syrian' and 'Assyrian'. The author feels authorized, then, by Dr Mar Aprem, metropolitan bishop of India: 'I have used this name in many of my books. In my opinion, the church should not feel guilty of using that name, for the term "Nestorian" is not without honour in history.'[39]

Ten years after the first edition, which has been out of print for some time, it was deemed appropriate to bring forth a second, revised edition of the present work. While some corrections and amendments have been incorporated into the first twelve chapters, the thirteenth and final chapter deals with new archaeological discoveries, the most recent developments within the Church, and the recent plight inflicted by the Islamic State on the Christians in Iraq. Any remaining inaccuracies and oversights are my responsibility alone. [40]

II The Beginnings of East Syrian Christianity

The political and religious situation on both sides of the Euphrates

The homeland of the Church of the East lies in Mesopotamia, the region bounded by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.[1] Since the Church has its roots in Mesopotamia and the bordering country of Iran, while Christianity began in the Roman vassal kingdom of Judea and spread rapidly throughout the Roman Empire, we will offer a brief analytical overview of the states on both sides of the Euphrates.[2]

Parthia – empire to the east of the Euphrates

About one hundred years after Alexander the Great led the Greeks to the edge of the world known to the West, a powerful opposing force of Iranian peoples advanced from Asia. One of these was the Parthians, relatives of the Indo-European Scythians, whose homeland extended from the Aral Sea to the Caspian Sea. Around 247 BCE they conquered north-eastern Iran and advanced gradually to the west, until they captured the city of Seleucia on the Tigris in 141 BCE. Around 55 BCE King Orodes II reinforced the military camp of Ctesiphon, on the opposite bank of the river from Seleucia, thus forming the double city of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the future see of the Church of the East.[3] Since the Parthian expansion to the west occurred simultaneously with the Roman advance towards the east, a clash between the two ambitious powers was unavoidable. In 92 BCE they agreed to the Euphrates as a shared border. The Parthian initiation of diplomatic relations with Rome, as well as with China, helped foster trade along the Silk Road, which included a 1600-kilometre stretch through Parthia.

The first Roman advance across the Euphrates ended in catastrophe in 53 BCE. The Roman triumvir Crassus sought for himself the same glory that his co-rulers Julius Caesar and Pompey had achieved. Instead, at Carrhae, south of Edessa, Rome suffered one of its most humiliating defeats, and Crassus lost his life. Three decades later Emperor Augustus and King Phraates IV ended a war neither could win and, in 20 BCE, recognized the Euphrates as the border, thus beginning the Pax Romana. The river became the place where East and West met – whether in friendship or in rivalry. For the spread of Christianity and for the history of the Church of the East, this border took on a fateful significance. Although Roman armies crossed the river repeatedly in the second and third centuries and conquered Seleucia-Ctesiphon, they had to retreat every time.[4] Politically and culturally, Mesopotamia remained part of Asia.

The mosque built by Caliph Marwan II (ruled 744–750) on the ruins of a Christian church in Carrhae (Harran).[2] Carrhae was not only a Nestorian diocese but also the seat of a famous university, where mathematics and Chaldean astrology were taught.[3] At Carrhae Rome suffered two serious defeats at the hands of its Iranian archenemies: in 53 BCE the Parthians defeated the triumvir Crassus, and in 260 CE Shapur I took Emperor Valerian prisoner. Carrhae, like Nisibis, Amida (Dyarbakir) and Aleppo, was plundered and destroyed by the Mongols in 1260.[4]

The cultural policy of the Parthians was, until the start of the Common Era, hellenophile. In addition to the Parthian language of Arcasid Pahlavi, Greek and Aramaic remained in use. In the realm of religion, Greco-Roman deities were popular with the ruling family, until a nationalistic resistance movement from the Persian heartland led to a revival of the old Iranian beliefs of Zoroastrianism and Mithraism. The Parthians then fostered the building of fire temples and began to collect the Zoroastrian traditions that were later codified in the Avesta.[5]

While the spread of Zoroastrianism was confined to the Parthian-Iranian cultural sphere, the cult of the ancient Indo-Iranian god Mithra, widespread in Iran, crossed the cultural boundary of the Euphrates and won over so many followers in the Roman Empire that in the second and third centuries it was one of the chief rivals of early Christianity. Mithra was the chief deity of the pre-Zoroastrian Iranian pantheon. He was worshipped as the god of the sun, light and war, as well as the god of justice and the patron of treaties. In Zoroastrianism, he supported Ahura Mazda in his battle against evil. In the Hellenistic context he was identified with the sun god Helios, and in Roman belief with Sol Invictus, which made him the favourite god of the army. The goal of the Mithra mysteries, widely popular in the Roman Empire, was to free the soul, which had been born in heaven, from the constraints of the body and to return it, via the seven cosmic spheres, to its origin.[6] On the whole, a spirit of religious tolerance

predominated among the Parthians, which helped enable the rapid spread of Christianity.

Rome – empire to the west of the Euphrates

The republican structure of Rome did not survive the autocratic rule of Julius Caesar and the subsequent struggles for power. Under Octavian (ruled 29 BCE – 14 CE) – who adopted the honourific Augustus, 'the exalted' – Rome became an empire. Rome remained the sole capital of the empire until 324 CE, when Emperor Constantine I (ruled 312 – 337), for strategic reasons, made the city of Byzantium on the Bosporus into a second, new capital, thus shifting the imperial centre of gravity to the east. Constantine I took this step for two reasons. First, increasing military pressure from the Goths and Sarmatians on the Danube and the Sassanians on the Euphrates called for the presence of the emperor and the organs of government close to the threatened eastern border. Second, the new capital controlled the maritime trade with Egypt and the Middle East, as well as the continental trade routes that linked Europe with Asia. Imperial unity collapsed towards the end of the fourth century, when Emperor Theodosius I (ruled 379 – 395) divided the empire between his two sons, giving Arkadios the east and Honorius the west. Although the Western Roman Empire fell in 476, the Eastern Roman Empire, also called the Byzantine Empire, persisted until 1453.

The expansion of Roman rule from the Roman-Hellenistic heartland to Asia and Africa led to unprecedented cosmopolitanism and religious syncretism. Militarily and economically, Rome was the victor, but in the realm of religion, it bowed to the vanquished. Such foreign deities as Isis and Osiris, Cybele and Attis, and, above all, Mithra, captured the hearts of the people with their mystery cults. But also the movements of asceticism, Gnosticism and apocalypticism, especially popular among Jews, offered a counterweight to the increasing loss of spiritual direction. Roman religion had long since ossified, since it provided no moral principles, no way of salvation, no possibility for a personal relationship with the divinity, and no emotional home in a faith community. It functioned, at best, as the personified ideal of civil life and the state. At worst, it deteriorated into a cult of the ruler, the idolization of a living person, which began with Emperor Nero and under Domitian was required of all citizens. In 85 CE Domitian began presumptuously signing documents as 'Lord and God'.[7]

Since no god, except for the Jewish, made a claim of absoluteness, the gods became interchangeable. 'The various cults were regarded by the people as equally true, by the philosophers as equally false, and by the authorities as equally useful.'[8] The twilight of the Greco-Roman gods must surely have provided fertile ground for extensive doctrines of salvation. One was the cult of Mithra, which, as Sol Invictus and his values of justice, duty and discipline, enjoyed particular approval among soldiers. The sole worship of the unconquerable sun god, who rose anew each dawn from the darkness of the night, had an affinity with the need for overcoming religious randomness and for a universal god. The Mithra cult was a preliminary, non-metaphysical step towards a monotheistic religion – a monolatry. The popularity of Mithra can be seen in Emperor Constantine's 333 declaration of 25 December, the traditional birthday of Sol Invictus, as the day of Jesus Christ's birth.[9] Already in 321, Constantine had declared the Day of the Sun an official Christian holiday.[10]

In the region surrounding the principality of Orhay (Edessa), which claimed for itself the title of the first Christian state in the world, there was also a latent monotheism. There the god Marilaha was worshipped as the universal *Lord-*

God. This proto-monotheism first paved the way for the success of Judaism in Edessa. Since there were in Edessa, as in all of Syria and western Mesopotamia, numerous examples of divine triads,[11] the environment was again peculiarly receptive to Christianity, as it enriched these two concepts with the figure of a divine–human mediator and made them more accessible.

The Church of the East owed its rapid expansion in Mesopotamia to the Jewish Diaspora as well, for the earlier missionary efforts to the east of the Euphrates, which presumably began towards the end of the first century, met with particular approval in Jewish circles. The numerically significant Jewish Diaspora in Mesopotamia, which included nearly a million people, had resulted from the earlier Assyrian and Babylonian invasions.[12] First, in 722 BCE, the Assyrians conquered Samaria and deported the ten tribes of Israel to the region of the two great rivers. Then, in 587 BCE, the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem and resettled the Jewish upper classes in Babylonia. Simultaneously, many Jews left the ravaged land for Syria and Asia Minor. Although some of the Jews who lived in Babylon slowly returned to Judea following Cyrus II's victory over Babylonia in 538 BCE, the ten tribes remained 'lost'. This led a few Protestant missionaries, who 'rediscovered' the Nestorians of Kurdistan in 1831, to consider them the descendants of the ten tribes of Israel.[13] The defeat of the second Jewish uprising of 132–135 CE resulted in an additional wave of Jewish immigration to Parthian Mesopotamia, but also to Arabia and India.

As far as Judea was concerned, it looked for almost a century as if the eschatological vision was being fulfilled, according to which the God of Israel, who was originally also worshipped as Yahweh Zebaoth, the *Lord of armies*,[14] would create in favour of Israel a new world order under the Maccabees. But in 63 BCE Pompey brought this dream to an end with the conquest of Jerusalem. Thus the Jews had to find a means to bridge the chasm between the claim to be the one chosen people of the one God, and the political reality. Responses ranged from that of the Zealots, who called for a holy war against Rome (they awaited the messiah as military commander), to those of the Pharisees, who promoted literal obedience of Mosaic Law; of the Hellenized and pro-Roman Sadducees; and of the numerous penitential preachers and communities anticipating the apocalypse.

Even though Judaism taught a clear, unambiguous message, for the majority of non-Jewish people, seeking a meaningful and living religiosity, it was unable to offer a viable alternative. Yahweh was, after all, a unique god for his chosen people; birth determined whether an individual belonged among the chosen or the lost. For this reason the prophet Ezra, after the return from the Babylonian exile, forbade mixed marriages with members of non-Jewish peoples and ordered the expulsion of foreign women.[15] The circumcision of adult men – a life-threatening procedure in those days – presented a further obstacle to eventual conversion. The later relaxation of these rules enabled successful Jewish missionary activity, as in, e.g., southern Arabia and Yemen. The rejection of circumcision for Gentile Christians, as enforced by Paul, and the emphasis on God as Lord of all people, transcending racial and national affiliations, prepared the way for the teachings of Jesus to achieve success as a world religion. National chosenness metamorphosed into universal chosenness, open to all orthodox believers.

Paul in Antioch and the broadening of paleo-Christianity

As a starting and ending point of the Silk Road, Antioch – the third-largest city in the Roman Empire – enjoyed extraordinary prosperity. The first Christians came to Antioch in the course of the flight resulting from the stoning of Stephen in 35CE.[16] There, around the year 40, the Greek term *christianoi*, Christian person, was used to distinguish the Greek-speaking Christians of Gentile origin from the Jewish Christians, called Nazarenes.[17] This distinction recalls the profound disagreement that shook the Christian community of Antioch, led by Peter and Barnabas, around 43/45. The dispute centred on the rejection of non-Jewish Christians by the Jewish Christians. The latter, supported by envoys of James, the Lord's brother, and by Peter, believed that the Mosaic purity laws, dietary guidelines and the obligation of circumcision applied to Gentile Christians as well.[18] The Jewish Christians saw in the rejection of circumcision a betrayal of God's covenant with Israel and thus refused to share the communal liturgical table with uncircumcised Gentile Christians.

Paul recognized the danger of a split within the nascent Christian community and vehemently opposed the rejection of the communal meal. Following the path of Jesus's preaching, he declared that the inner spirit of the mind and interpersonal relationships were more important than cultic purity. By turning his attention to Jews and Arabs, to scholars, fishermen, tax collectors and prostitutes, Jesus abolished the distinction, fundamental in Judaism, between pure and impure persons. Salvation depended not on circumcision but rather on baptism and belief in Jesus and his redeeming power.[19] 'There is no longer Jew and Greek, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.'[20] The new chosen people is a community of faith open to all; the old Mosaic criteria had become irrelevant. Paul, Barnabas and Titus travelled to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles James, Peter and John of Zebedee. This Apostolic Council of the year 48[21] largely confirmed Paul's position, adding only four minor qualifications.[22] Thanks to Paul's wisdom, Jesus' teaching was transformed from one of the countless Jewish messianic sects into a universal religion transcending ethnic particularities. Expressed in simple terms, the faithful are born into Judaism, but received into Christianity.

Although the Apostolic Council resolved the question of circumcision within the Roman Empire, the issue re-emerged among the Nestorians of Mesopotamia after the seventh century as a result of the Arab conquest. Islamic scholars reproached Christians for failing to have themselves circumcised, as their prophet Jesus had been. They replied that baptism had replaced circumcision, as Christ had abolished the latter by his own baptism. Neither an external sign nor ritual cleansings were crucial for the covenant with God, but rather the symbolic death and resurrection in baptism and the inner purity of the heart. 'What good does it do a darkened house to have lamps on its outer walls while the rooms within remain unlit?'[23] Regarding the replacement of circumcision with baptism, the East Syrian metropolitan Odisho of Nisibis (1250–1318) wrote, 'The Jews had to distinguish themselves bodily from the other heathens, since God had determined that the messiah would appear among their descendants. In the same way [like circumcision] a man marks his camels, sheep and horses, to distinguish his possessions from those of strangers. The baptism of true believers [however] encompasses the mystery of death and resurrection. For immersion in an abyss of water is similar to death, as one no longer has senses, as when one is buried in the earth. The emergence from the water is the symbol of resurrection,

St Peter's cave church in Antakya, Turkey, formerly Antioch. As a starting and ending point of the ancient Silk Road, Antioch was one of the largest and wealthiest cities of the Roman Empire. From here traders travelled to China via the cities of Edessa, Nisibis, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Ray (Teheran) and Merv – all early and important dioceses of the Church of the East. The grotto of Peter is a natural cave, which, according to tradition, the evangelist Luke gave to the young Christian community. Paul, Barnabas and Peter are said to have preached here. The facade, built by the Crusaders after 1098, was restored in 1863. Today the grotto of Peter belongs to the Catholic Church and is looked after by Capuchins.[3]

resembling rising from the grave. For this reason, the apostles required that, before baptism, the candidates wear black penitential garments and afterwards white robes, to represent the transition from the world of darkness to the world of light.'[24]

On the one hand, the Apostolic Council ensured Christian unity, but, on the other, it deepened the rift with Judaism, since it raised the general question of the abandonment of Jewish law. The imprisonment of Paul by the Jewish temple police that led to his death around 58[25] and the stoning of the leader of Jerusalem's community James, ordered by the high priest Hannas II four years later,[26] as well as the refusal of the Christians to participate in the first Jewish revolt, made the gap unbridgeable, as was shown by the interpretation of the destruction of the Temple in 70. Christians, as well as Jews, considered it a judgement of God, but for different reasons: for the former, it was the just punishment for having carried out the crucifixion of Christ; for the latter, it expressed God's anger over faulty observance of Mosaic Law.[27] Not least, the successful proselytization in the Jewish communities provoked the official condemnation of Christians by the Jewish academy at Jamnia around the year 80.[28] The conflict growing out of the desire to lay claim to the heritage of the Jewish tradition while simultaneously disassociating oneself from contemporary Judaism led to a position critical of the Jews, which was also found in the Church of the East. In the second century this conflict resulted in the founding of a rival Church by Marcion.[29]

Christianity crosses the Euphrates

The traditions of Mar Thoma, Mar Addai and Mar Aggai, and the correspondence of King Abgar of Edessa with Jesus Christ

The question of when the Church of the East began, defined as the start of missionary activity east of the Euphrates, leads directly to the conflict between Nestorian tradition and the testimony of textual criticism. No fewer than ten names appear among those who claim to have been the first to carry the Good News to the east. Tradition and scholarship do concur, at least, regarding where Christianity first took hold, namely in Edessa (Urfa) and Adiabene (northern Iraq). Reports that the Three Kings[30] or the pilgrims who had been in Jerusalem at Pentecost[31] were the first missionaries to the Parthian Empire clearly belong in the realm of myth. Likewise, we must not concern ourselves with the traditions about Peter, Benjamin and Bartholomew, who are associated with India, as well as Lycaonia,

Ethiopia, Arabia and Armenia.[32] Abha was, for his part, simply a companion of Mar Mari.[33] The names of St Thomas, Mar Addai, Mar Aggai and Mar Mari, however, ought to be taken seriously, especially since they occupy the first four places in the official chronology of the patriarchs of the Church of the East.[34]

Two distinct traditions exist regarding the apostle Thomas, and these appear, at first glance, mutually exclusive. According to Eusebius of Caesarea and later Nestorian sources, the apostle brought the Gospel to the Parthians.[35] By contrast, according to the apocryphal Acts of Thomas[36] and the Syrian *Didascalia Apostolorum*,[37] the Doctrine of the Apostles, of the same age, he travelled to the court of King Gondophares in India. Both of these anonymous Syrian documents from the first half of the third century are based on Jesus's call for a universal mission[38] and gather the various traditions into a worldwide plan, according to which the apostles divided the world into twelve regions and assigned them by casting lots. In this manner, India was assigned to the apostle Thomas; Edessa, Arabia and the regions bordering Mesopotamia to one of the seventy apostles called Addai; and Mesopotamia as far as the border with India to Aggai, a disciple of Addai. The three missionary regions followed one another seamlessly and stretched from Edessa to Gog and Magog – that is, to the other side of the known world.[39] Later, the Nestorian mission to China forced open precisely such borders. The two Thomas traditions can, in fact, be harmonized, since historical evidence, in the form of coins bearing his name and a stone inscription, proves the existence of the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares. He ruled over the region now encompassing south-eastern Iran and Pakistan, from c. 19 to 50 CE. It is thus conceivable that Eusebius could have character-ized his empire as 'Parthian'.[40] While nothing has been conclusively determined regarding the historical veracity of the Thomas mission, the possibility of his journey to India cannot be excluded, especially since regular maritime traffic took place between Rome and India.[41]

Mar Addai is the central figure of *The Doctrine of Addai*, a Syriac work written around 400, which adopts and expands on Eusebius's narrative from a century earlier.[42] It tells of the missionizing of Edessa and of the correspondence of King Abgar V Ukama (ruled 9–46) with Jesus Christ. Edessa, the Syrian Orhay, was the capital of the small kingdom of Osroene, which lay in a double lock between Parthia and Rome. It owed its wealth to the control of a section of the Silk Road, which ran west towards Antioch and east towards Nisibis, but it was also at the mercy of the two great opposing powers. In 214 CE Emperor Caracalla made it a Roman prefecture.

According to the Doctrine of Addai, around the year 31 King Abgar V, who suffered from leprosy, wrote a letter to Jesus, asking for healing and inviting him to Edessa.[43] In his reply, Jesus praised the king for believing in him without knowing him; he himself could not come to Abgar, since he had to complete his mission and return home to his Father. But he promised to send a disciple, who would cure him and bless Edessa. While Jesus dictated his response to Abgar's envoy, Hanan, this man painted his picture and took it back with him to Edessa, where it became a greatly honoured talisman of the city,[44] until it was taken to Byzantium in 944. Later, during the iconoclastic controversy, this image, called the *Mandylion*, served as an iconodulist argument in favour of the Byzantine painting of icons of Christ.[45]

After the ascension of Christ, Thomas sent Addai to the ailing king.[46] He cured him and then turned to preaching to the people, condemning the worship of the planets and idolatry: 'It is a terrible and incurable sickness when creatures worship other creatures. It is blasphemy to place

The Armenian St Thaddeus Monastery in north-western Iran is said to have been founded in the fifth century by a hermit in the place where he found the bones of the apostle Thaddeus. The small church, built of dark stone blocks, was erected in 1319–1329 and restored in 1490. The light-coloured church, added to the west, was donated by the Persian crown prince Abbas Mirza in 1810–1820. St Thaddeus is often erroneously equated with Mar Addai, the missionary of Edessa, as Thaddeus was one of the twelve apostles and Addai one of the seventy.[6]

creatures, which are foreign to His nature, on the same level with the Creator.' These words anticipate Mohammed's rebuke of idol worshippers. Then Addai continued: 'Even if you do not know the Scriptures, doesn't nature teach you that the eyes of your idols see nothing? They are not to blame, for they are deaf and dumb, but you are at fault.'[47] The king then converted, and Addai sent missionaries disguised as traders to Mesopotamia. Shortly before his death he named Aggai as his successor, who likewise sent missionaries to the east. A few years after Abgar's death, one of his sons had Aggai murdered in the church, and the dying man appointed Palut as his successor. And so go the legends – but what are the facts?

It is certain that Edessa had a church very early, and the city chronicle reports that it was destroyed by the great flood of 201.[48] Thus the church of Edessa would have been the first historically verified Christian house of worship, even earlier than the chapel of the border city of Dura Europas, on the Euphrates, which was built between 232 and 256.[49] It is impossible that King Abgar V was a Christian, though King Abgar VIII, who ruled almost two centuries later (177–212), may have been. The sole witness is Bardaisan of Edsesa (154–222), who wrote in his 'Book of the Laws of the Lands': 'King Abgar adopted the faith'.[50] However, Bardaisan was later expelled from the Orthodox Church as a heretic. He also gathered around himself his own followers and founded one of the faith communities that rivalled the Orthodox Church, as had done Marcion (c. 85–160) and Mani (216–272 / 274),

(Opposite page, left) King Abgar V of Edessa holds the Mandylion, presented to him by his ambassador Hanan. Detail of a wooden icon from the tenth century, Monastery of St Catherine, Sinai, Egypt.[7]

(Right) The citadel of Edessa (Sanliurfa) Turkey. On the eastern marble column (left in illustration), an inscription in Old Syriac reports that it is dedicated to Queen Shalmath, who was either the wife of Abgar VIII (ruled 177–212) or the daughter of King Ma'nu VIII (ruled 214–239). The fortress seen today dates back to the Crusaders of 1098. The church that was flooded in 201 presumably stood at the north-eastern base of the citadel. At the north-western base is shown a cave, venerated by Muslims, which, according to a local legend, was the birthplace of Abraham.[8]

whose churches were active in Edessa. Was Abgar VIII a follower of Bardaisan or of Palut, who, as representative of the Orthodox Church in Edessa in the late second and early third centuries, represented only a minority of believers calling themselves Christian? At that time there predominated in Edessa an internal Christian syncretism of Babylonian proportions, in which Marcionites and Manichaeans referred to themselves as Christians and the followers of Palut were called 'Palutians'.[51] Despite this, it is possible that King Abgar VIII called himself a Christian. The first historically verifiable bishop of Edessa is Qune (†313), who may have further encouraged the Abgar legend.

When, around 370, the bones of the apostle Thomas were taken to Edessa, as we learn from one of Ephrem's hymns,[52] Edessa's prestige increased. Now this city could claim to be the first Christian principality in world history, as well as to possess the letter of Jesus, a portrait of him from his lifetime and the relics of the apostle Thomas. Edessa prided itself on being the 'mother city of Syrian Christianity'.[53] The theme of the Abgar legend – which presumably served as a model for Eusebius towards the end of the third century – became part of the glorification of Edessa, as it elevated its ruler to a forerunner of Emperor Constantine. In addition, it attested to the orthodoxy of the Christians vis-à-vis rival sects by tracing its Episcopal authority back to an apostle.[54] In sum, several Christian groups were found in Edessa in the second century. Still today, Edessa's contributions in the realms of

theology and linguistics are recognized. It was home to the renowned School of Edessa, also called the School of the Persians, where Ephrem the Syrian (306–373) taught after his flight from Nisibis in 363. This school developed into a stronghold of Antiochene theology, which provided the foundation of the dogma of the Church of the East.

Likewise unquestioned is the fact that both Syriac languages and scripts developed out of the Aramaic dialect of Edessa. This language, which was widespread in Syria and Parthia and functioned as the lingua franca of Egypt and Asia Minor as far as India, was Jesus's mother tongue and belongs to the Semitic language family. Beginning in the fifth century BCE, it replaced Hebrew as the colloquial language of the Jews. Its consonant alphabet is a further development of the Phoenician. Thanks to the Syriac Gospel harmony of Tatian (c. 170) and the Tetragospels called the *Peshitta* (c. 400), Syriac spread rapidly in Asian Christianity.[55] The earliest version is Estrangela, which evolved, after the split of the Miaphysite Jacobites from the Dyophysite Nestorians, into the Serto script in the west in the early eighth century and later into the Nestorian script in the east.[56] Also belonging to the sphere of Aramaic script culture – in part because of the Nestorian mission to Asia – are the right-to-left and/or top-to-bottom script of the Sogdians, the Uigurs, the Mongols and the Manchurians.[57] Finally, since the fourteenth century, Christian texts have often been written in Arabic and a related Syrian script, Garshuni,

The former St John the Baptist Church of Edessa, which the Miaphysite bishop Nona and successor of the Nestorian bishop Ibas had built in 457. In the late fifth century the bones of Mar Addai were brought here. The church served as cathedral for the Crusaders from 1098 to 1144, after which it was converted into a mosque by Saleh ad-Din Ayyubi. In the three-naved, 35-metre-long, 20-metre-wide, and 9-metre-tall building it is notable that the apse is oriented not towards Mecca but towards the east. Each set of six round columns forms five arches, which separate the main nave from the side aisles. The lower windows are decorated on both sides with stone figures depicting entwined snakes, which one also finds in monasteries of Tur Abdin. The mosque was renovated at the end of the eighteenth century. For its part, the Circis Peygamer mosque was built on the Church of St Sergius and St Simeon, erected by the Nestorian bishop Ibas before 457.[9]

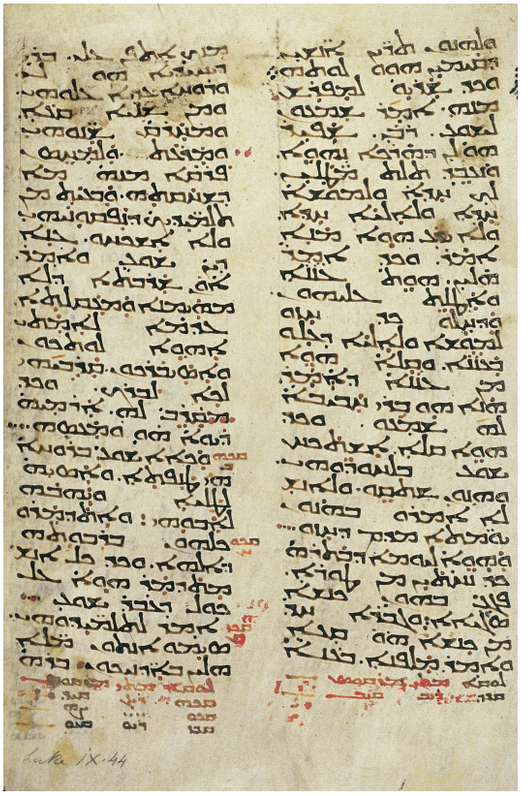
of which there are, again, a West Syrian and an East Syrian version.[58]

Although Syriac is still used today in both Syrian Churches as a liturgical language, its use as a colloquial language is rapidly declining, not least because of the Christians' emigration to western countries. While in Tur Abdin in south-eastern Turkey the few remaining West Syrians still speak a dialect called *Turoyo*, the East Syrian dialect family, called *Surit*, is still spoken by the approximately 200,000 Nestorians and Chaldeans on the plain of Mosul, in Baghdad, in Iranian Azerbaijan and the northern Syrian region of Khabur. In the European, American and Australian Diaspora, however, Surit is slowly dying out as a colloquial language. Yet the West Syrian dialect, still spoken today around Ma'alula, north of Damascus, has lost its religious association and is used by Christians of various denominations, as well as by Muslims.[59]

Mar Mari and the first missionary journey to the Parthian Empire

'Our brothers from Parthia do not marry two wives; Jewish Christians are not circumcised, our sisters from *Gilan* and *Kushan* do not associate with foreigners; those from *Persia* do not marry their daughters; those from *Media* do not abandon their dead, nor do they give them to the dogs to eat, nor do they bury the dying while still alive, Christians from Edessa do not kill their wives or sisters who commit adultery, and those from *Hatra* do not stone thieves.'[60] This quote from Bardaisan's 'Book of the Laws of the Lands' from the early third century is not merely instructive on account of the descriptions of the morals of the Asian peoples mentioned but also provides valuable evidence of how far Christianity had spread to the east by the end of the Parthian dynasty (224/226 CE). Parthia should be understood here as Mesopotamia, and Persia and Media as Iran. Gilan lies to the south of the Caspian Sea, the most westerly part of the great Kushan empire was Transoxania, and Hatra lies south of Mosul. At the start of the third century, Christian cells existed in all of these regions. What do other sources report?

The Syrian acts of Mar Mari, from the sixth/seventh century, which take up the Abgar legend, credit Mar Mari with the first complete evangelization of Mesopotamia. He serves as the apostle to Mesopotamia, whose two major rivers, the Euphrates and the Tigris, according to Genesis, flowed out of paradise (Gen 2:14). According to the acts, Mar Addai sent him from Edessa to the east. He first taught in Nisibis and then moved on to Arbil, the capital of the principality of Adiabene in modern Iraqi Kurdistan, where he cured the king of leprosy and cast out a demon from the son of an officer. On the way south, he, like Jesus, healed the afflicted, cast demons



Manuscript Syrus Curetonianus. An Old Syriac manuscript on parchment, written in Estrangela script, from the mid-fifth century. (British Museum, London. Add. 14451 f49v.)

out of the possessed and even raised the dead. In Seleucia-Ctesiphon he encountered resistance; the citizens wanted nothing of the Good News. Only a successful demonstration of divine judgement, in which the apostle remained unharmed in a blazing fire,[61] enabled a few conversions, after which Mari destroyed a pagan temple and erected atop its ruins a chapel – the future cathedral of Kokhe. He then followed the Tigris south, reached present-day Basra and concluded his journey in Khuzistan and the province of Persia. The acts close with the extolling of Mari, who, like a 'pillar of fire', led believers through the desert of ignorance into the kingdom of the Gospel.[62]

The acts represent an obvious attempt to portray the Christianization of the Nestorian heartland as the work of an apostle. They cannot be taken at face value, although the historian J. M. Fiey believes that the church of Kokhe was in fact founded at the time of Mari. On account of the description of Mari's chapel and the fact that, between 79 and 116, the Tigris altered its course, he concludes that Mari must have laid the cornerstone before 79 / 116.[63] However, the first historically certain bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon was Papa, who served from c. 290 to 315 and died in 327. We can be assured that, beginning in the second century, there existed in Seleucia-Ctesiphon an independent Christian community, which showed evidence of an episcopal structure in the third century. Already around 315 Bishop Papa tried to gain primacy over the other dioceses of the Church and to impose on them a disciplined administration. Although Papa himself failed to achieve this, the other bishops soon accepted that the bishop of the capital should take over the administrative leadership of the Church.[64] In any case, it is certain that the diocese of Seleucia-Ctesiphon – that is, the nascent Church of the East – was never subordinated to Antioch. Reports stating that the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon required

the recognition of the bishop of Antioch are later forgeries. The article from the corpus of Nicea of 325, according to which no East Syrian synod may

(Right) The large arch of Chosrau the Great (ruled 531–579) in Seleucia-Ctesiphon, which Shapur I (ruled 240/41–272) presumably had built by Christian prisoners of war.[10] The Ivan is the largest brick barrel vault in the world. Until 780 the patriarchal see of the church was in Seleucia-Ctesiphon.

(Opposite page) The Convent of St Thecla in Ma'alula, where Aramaic is still spoken. This important pilgrimage site memorializes the Roman officer's daughter Thecla, who became a student of the apostle Paul against the will of her parents and took refuge from her persecutors in a cave in Ma'alula.

take place without the consent of the patriarch of Antioch, is also an apocryphal postscript from the fifth century.[65]

The Chronicle of Adiabene, dating from the sixth century, offers information about the region north of Baghdad. According to this disputed chronicle,[66] Mar Addai personally consecrated the first bishop, Mar Pkidha (in office 104–114), which would seem to be a daring claim.[67] However, conditions in Adiabene were favourable for early missionary efforts, since, as in Edessa and Nisibis, a large Jewish community lived there, and it was there that the Parthian vassal Prince Izates converted to Judaism around the year 60. There were also close diplomatic and trade ties between Edessa and Adiabene, as the two princely families were allied with one another.[68] It is certain that, following his condemnation in Rome around 172, Tatian (c. 110–180), author of the Gospel harmony called the *Diatessaron*, returned to his homeland of Assyria, probably to Adiabene. He characterized himself as proud to be an Assyrian and scorned the Hellenistic world. His 'Address to the Greek' ends as follows: 'In every way the East excels and most of all in its religion, the Christian religion, which also comes from Asia and which is far older and truer than all the philosophies and crude religious myths of the Greeks.'[69] After his return, he spread his gospel in Assyria and taught a strict form of asceticism. This uncompromising asceticism – condemned in the West as Encratism – which demanded from true Christians a separation from the world

and its pleasures, since it condemned matter as evil in itself, left a decisive mark on East Syrian monasticism.

Also in the region of Nisibis, lying halfway between Edessa and Adiabene, there were Christian communities at the end of the second century, as is evident from inscriptions on the grave of the bishop of Hierapolis, Avircius Marcellus.[70] Nisibis was a border city, fought over by the Romans and the Persians, which was fortified into a mighty citadel by Emperor Diocletian in 297. The first bishop of Nisibis for whom there is historical evidence is the one-time ascetic Jacob (†338), who took office around 301 or 308 and participated in the Council of Nicea in 325. From 313 to 320 Bishop Jacob had built the great cathedral that is named for him, to which Bishop Vologes added in 359 the baptistery that still stands today. In the eighth century then Metropolitan Sabrisho I rebuilt the ruined cathedral and integrated the baptistery into it as a southern chapel.[71] The 'discovery' of the place where Noah's Ark came to rest also goes back to Bishop Jacob. According to Syrian tradition, this was not Mount Ararat but rather Mount Djudi, east of Cizre in south-eastern Turkey, where the ruins of the Nestorian monastery still stand.[72]

In neighbouring Tur Abdin, 'Mount of the Servants', there arose from the fourth century onwards one of the most renowned centres of East Syrian monasticism, whose hermitages and monasteries were grouped high above the plain of Nisibis in the Izla Mountains. Members of the oldest East Syrian monasteries, which dated from the early fourth century, included Mar Augin, Mar Yuhanon and Mar Malke, though the last converted as early as the seventh century to the Syrian Orthodox Church, also called the Jacobite. In the seventh century the Great Monastery, founded in 571 by the reformer of Nestorian monasticism, Abraham of Kashkar (491–586), became a source of renewal for East Syrian spirituality.[73] Also beginning in the seventh century, the Izla Mountains became the meeting place of the two rival Syrian sister Churches, the Nestorian and the Jacobite. The Nestorian metropolitan see of Nisibis officially came to an end in 1616, and the last Nestorian monks left the monastery of Mar Augin between 1838 and 1842.[74] Nisibis's reputation was founded not only on the monasteries of the Izla Mountains, however, but also on the School of Nisibis, which was likewise traced back to Bishop Jacob, who wanted to fight Arianism, which had been condemned at the Council of Nicea in 325. In any case, we know that he employed Ephrem the Syrian as a biblical exegete. When the city was handed over to the Sassanian king Shapur II in 363, Christian instruction ceased, and Ephrem fled to Roman Edessa, where he taught until his death and supported his bishop in the fight against Arianism.[75]

Let us turn now to the delta of the Tigris and Euphrates. Evidence shows that the region around today's port city of Basra in southern Iraq, then known as Prat de Maishan, was elevated to a metropolitan see shortly after 310,[76] after an earlier Bishop David of Basra is said to have carried out missionary work in India,[77] from which one can conclude that Christian communities existed here, too, in the third century. Also supporting this claim is the discovery of Christian graves with Syriac inscriptions from the mid-third century on the island of Kharg in the upper Persian Gulf. Archaeological excavations have shown that later, from the fifth to the eleventh centuries, a Nestorian monastery with sixty cells stood on the island. The monastery included a church with three naves, whose walls featured stucco ornamentation in the Sassanian style. In those days the island functioned as a trade centre for ships from India and China on the way to Mesopotamia. The discovery of countless pieces of glass permits the assumption that the monks themselves produced glass for export.[78]

The St Jacob Church, founded in 313, in Nisibis (Nusaybin), south-eastern Turkey. Its founder Jacob participated in the Council of Nicea in 325. In the eighth century the Nestorian metropolitan Sabrisho I renovated the cathedral, the oldest remaining part of which is the baptistery from 359, visible on the lower edge of the picture. Nisibis was a metropolitan see of the Church of the East until 1616.[11] *In 1915 Turkish massacres eradicated the last Christians.*

In considering the question of among whom Christianity first found acceptance in Mesopotamia, four groups of people are relevant: first, the numerically significant Jewish Diaspora; and, second, the native Aramaeans, Assyrians and Chaldeans of northern Mesopotamia, to whom the Persians came towards the end of the third century. Beginning in the mid-third century additional Christian refugees streamed into the empire of the Sassanians, as they fled the persecutions of the Roman emperors Decius in 250, Valerian in 257–258 and Diocletian in 303–304. The fourth numerically important group were the Roman and later Byzantine prisoners of war and deportees, whom the Sassanian kings resettled in their empire, again beginning in the mid-third century. For instance, in 260 Shapur I (ruled 240–272) laid waste to Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia and conquered Antioch, from which he deported tens of thousands of Christians, including Bishop Demetrius, and resettled them in Mesopotamia and the ancient province of Susiana. There he had built the city of Gondeshapur, called Beit Lapat by the Syrians. However, the deported Christians of Greek descent refused to be integrated into the Church of the East and instead created their own Episcopal congregations, which used Greek as their liturgical language. The xenophobic Zoroastrian high priest Kartir was also aware of this distinction within Christianity, as he distinguished in his famous inscription of Naqsh-Radjab (c. 290) between Aramaic-speaking 'Nasraye' and Greek-speaking 'Krestyane'.[79] Only the

The Monastery of Mar Augin, founded by East Syrian monks in the early FOURTH century, was until 1629 a stronghold of Nestorian monasticism. The last Syrian Orthodox monk of Mar Augin died in 1974. Near Mar Augin stand the ruins of the formerly Nestorian monasteries of Mar Yuhanon, Mar Abraham the Elder and Mar Malke.[12] The Syrian Orthodox Monastery of Mar Augin has re-opened in April 2010.

Christian places and monasteries of Tur Abdin.

rebuilding of ecclesiastical structures, which followed the seventy-year-long persecutions and occurred on the occasion of the synod of 410, brought an end to this doubling of hierarchies.

Later prisoners of war were either Orthodox faithful to Chalcedon or Miaphysites, who formed their own congregations and did not assimilate. The monopoly of the Church of the East over Sassanian Christianity came under still greater pressure when the Miaphysites, who were persecuted in the Byzantine Empire starting in 519, sought refuge to the east of the Euphrates and set up their own hierarchy there. These various waves of immigration of Christian refugees help account for the fact that, although at the start of the seventh century Christians constituted nearly half the population of the Iranian Empire, about 75 per cent of these were Nestorians, 20 per cent Miaphysite Jacobites and 5 per cent Melkites faithful to Chalcedon.[80]

In retrospect, three factors contributed to the rapid success of the missionary efforts in the east: First, significant Jewish exile communities were living in Mesopotamia. Second, Aramaic served as lingua franca from Antioch to Central Asia, enabling Aramaic-speaking missionaries to communicate easily with both Jews and non-Jewish merchants and members of the upper classes. Third, the close-meshed net formed by the various routes of the Silk Road eased the spread of new religions. Although the Roman-Parthian border was generally tightly maintained, traders or missionaries disguised as traders could cross it unhindered. In fact, the missionizing of Mesopotamia, which moved from Edessa to Nisibis, Arbil, Seleucia-Ctesiphon and Maishan, followed the land routes of the Silk Road. The sea routes then enabled the expansion of missionary activity to the islands of Kharg and Socotra, as well as – presumably – South India.

The Thomas Christians of South India

'[The Saviour said to him:] Fear not, Thomas, go to India and preach the Word there, for my grace is with you. But he did not obey and said: Wherever you wish to send me, send me, but somewhere else! For I will not go to the Indians.' Acts of Thomas.[81]

Just as Jonah once refused to go to Nineveh at God's command, and God outwitted him with the help of a giant fish, Thomas does not want to obey Jesus. Jesus – presented in the Acts of Thomas as the apostle's twin brother – also plays a trick on him. When he encounters a merchant from India, whom King Gondophares has directed to bring him a builder and carpenter, Jesus sells him his brother Thomas. The merchant travels with Thomas by sea to India and presents him to his king, who assigns him to build a palace. But, instead of building this, he spends months distributing the money entrusted to him, until the king orders Thomas to show him the allegedly completed palace. 'You cannot see it now,' the apostle informs him; 'rather you will see it only when you have departed from this life.' The message is clear and marked by Neo-Platonic thought: the world assumed by us to be true is unreal and insignificant, and the true world lies on the other side and is accessible only to the enlightened mind's eye.

The ignorant king grows angry and decides to have Thomas skinned and burned. Then the king's brother Gad dies and angels bear his soul to heaven, where he is to choose his new home. He selects, of all places, the palace built by the apostle, which the angels deny him. But they allow him to return to earth to buy the palace from his brother, after which the king asks Thomas, as the 'servant of God', for forgiveness and instruction. The king suspects that his builder is Jesus Christ, who appears to him in the form of his twin brother, which is likewise a Gnostic

element. Overjoyed, the apostle administers the three sacraments to the king, making him a Christian. These sacraments are the 'seal' of baptism, anointing with oil and the Eucharist.[82] In the last chapter of the acts, Thomas leaves the king and journeys to South India, where he dies as a martyr at Mylapore near Madras. According to Indian tradition, Thomas did not travel directly from Gondophares's realm to Madras but, rather, made landfall on the island of Malankara in the bay of Cranganore, in the coastal region of Kerala. Here he founded seven churches along the Malabar Coast before being killed around 68 CE in Mylapore. This tradition is also recalled by the official names of six of the eight Oriental Churches of India, which include designations of either Malankar or Malabar.[83] The relics of the apostle also made a long journey. Around 370 they were transferred to Edessa, where they remained until they were moved before the fall of the Crusader state of Edessa in 1144 to the island of Chios, and then again in 1258 to Ortona on the Adriatic coast for safe keeping. In 1953 the relics came full circle when the Vatican gave the right arm of the apostle to the newly built Thomas mausoleum in Cranganore.

No evidence exists for an apostolic mission to Kerala. However, considerable evidence shows that diplomatic relations, as well as a flourishing maritime trade, existed between the Roman Empire and the west coast of India. Thanks to knowledge of the monsoon winds, ships could cross the Indian Ocean between Egypt and Cranganore, called Muziris by the Romans, in less than two months. Pliny the Elder referred to Muziris as 'primium emporium Indiae' – the first port of India – and Strabo (63 BCE – 21 CE) reported that, every year, 120 ships linked the two continents together. The discovery of 2300 Roman coins from the period from 123 BCE to 117 CE testifies to the significance of this trading relationship.[84]

The apostle Thomas, the most highly venerated apostle of the Church of the East, in the illustrated Gospel book on parchment from Mardin. It was given to the Church of the Mother of God of Ziad in 1272 by Bishop Dioscuros (1222 – 1282), who had it rebound. Its original owner was named as Abu Shahak, possibly a Nestorian jurist who died in 912. Whether the illustrations are in fact older than the text, which is written in the Serto script, remains disputed.[13] (Library of the Church of the Forty Martyrs, Mardin, Turkey.)

The first historical witness to an autonomous Christian community in Kerala may be Pantaenus, who, according to Eusebius and Jerome, was sent by his bishop between 180 and 190 from Alexandria to India, where he encountered Christians.[85] A century later Bishop David of Basra, mentioned above, travelled to India around 295 / 300, establishing the first official contact between the Thomas Christians of South India and the Church of the East.[86] Then, around 345, one Bishop Joseph of Edessa – who, at the Council of Nicea, had signed as 'bishop of all the churches of Persia and of Great India' – visited Kerala. Presumably, the hierarchal integration of the Thomas Christians into the Church of the East, which endured until the forced 'conversion' of the East Syrian Christians of Kerala to Roman Catholicism in 1599, began with Bishop Joseph. This tie to the Thomas Christians was formalized around 410 or 420 with the creation of the metropolitan see of Rew Ardashir, which had jurisdiction over the Indian dioceses.[87]

The stone cross in front of the formerly Nestorian Church of St Mary in Kuravalangad, Kerala, bears a Middle Persian inscription from the seventh/ninth century. The great bronze bell of the church from 1584 has a Nestorian inscription.[14] *Today the church belongs to the Roman Catholic Church.*

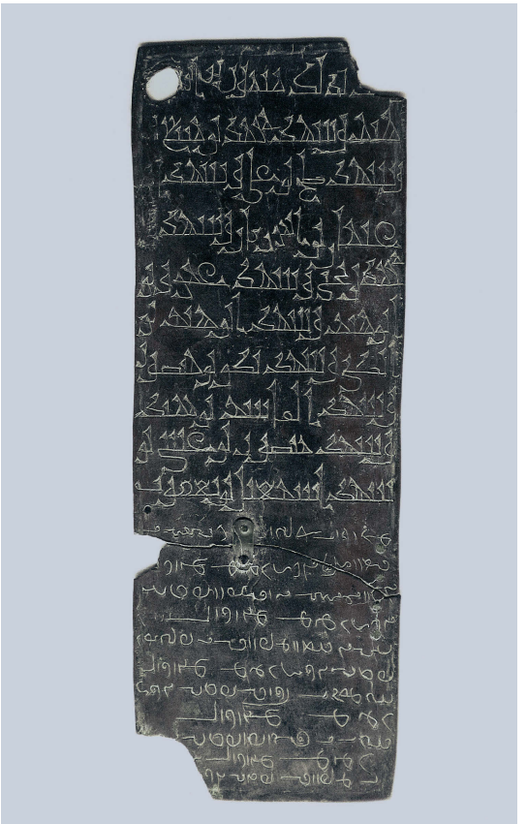
The next two historical witnesses are disputed. One concerns the Byzantine envoy and Bishop Theophilus, who certainly visited the kingdom of Himyar in modern Yemen before 356 but hardly India.[88] The other dubious witness concerns a merchant, Thomas of Kana, who landed in Cranganore with 72 families in, depending on the source, 345, 754, 774 or 795.[89] Even if this information seems unbelievable, it is conceivable that Christians had fled the Sassanian Empire for India before the severe persecutions instituted by Shapur II around 341. More reliable is the reference by the metropolitan of Merv, Ishodad, that in 425 a priest from India named David translated the Letter to the Romans into Persian.[90]

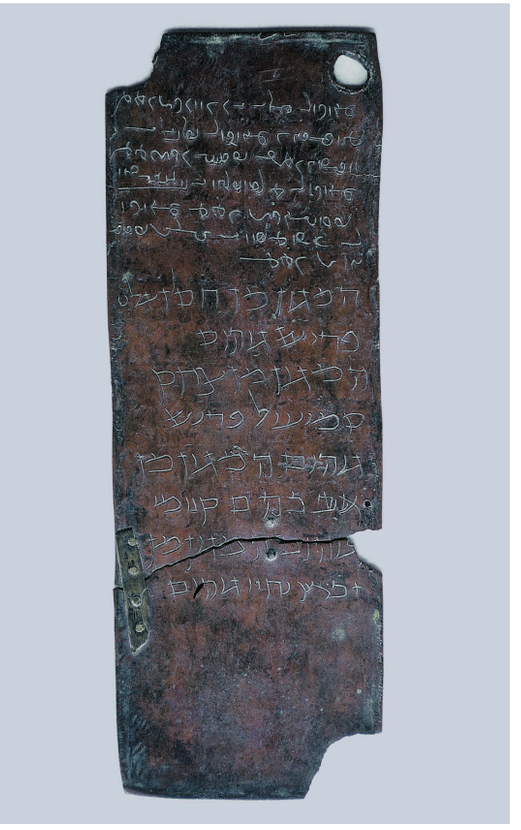
A century later an Egyptian sailor, writing under the pseudonym Cosmas Indicopleustes, published an anti-Ptolemaic polemic entitled 'Topographia christiana', which described the world not as a sphere but as a disk. The value of

Christian places of Kerala.

Nestorian stone cross in the now Syrian Orthodox Church of Valiya Palli in Kottayam, Kerala, from the sixth/ninth centuries. It testifies to the close relationship between the Church of the East and the Thomas Christians of Kerala. The text reads: 'Who believes in the Messiah and God above and in the Holy Ghost is redeemed through the grace of Him who bore the cross.'[15]

the book, addressed to the Nestorian patriarch Mar Aba, lies in its description of the Christian communities he encountered during his voyage of 522 / 525 to Ethiopia, India and Sri Lanka. 'Even in Taprobane [Sri Lanka] there is a church of Christians, with clergy and believers.' He added later, 'The island has a church of Persian Christians and a priest who is appointed by Persia.' Regarding India, we learn that there were also Christians 'in the region of Malé [Malabar], where pepper grows'. And 'in Calliana [the city of Quilon] there is moreover a bishop, who is appointed from Persia; likewise on the island of the Dioscorides [Socotra] in the Indian Ocean'. There 'the inhabitants speak Greek; there are clergy who receive their ordination in Persia and are sent to the island, and a multitude

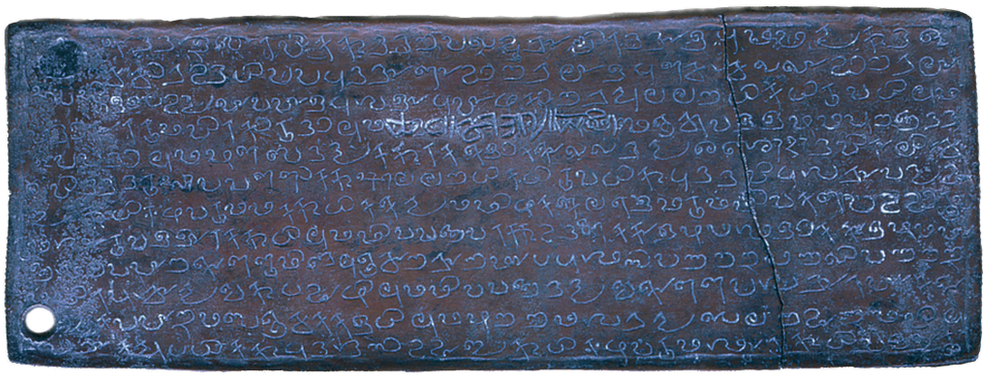




One of the two copper tablets from 849 held by the patriarchal see of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar in Tiruvalla, Kerala. The tablet, inscribed on both sides, is the final page of a document in which Governor Atikal Tiruvatikal confirms various privileges to the East Syrian Terisa Church of Quilon. On the front of the tablet the witnesses are listed in Arabic in the Kufic script, as well as in Pahlavi, and on the back in Pahlavi and Judaeo-Persian (Persian in Hebrew script).

of Christians'.[91] This report demonstrates the integration of the Christian communities of Socotra, Sri Lanka and South India into the Church of the East. As a consequence of the disagreement between Patriarch Ishoyahb III (in office 650–660) and the rebellious metropolitan of Rew Ardashir, Shimun, who incited the Thomas Christians to disobedience against the patriarch, the patriarch removed the Indian bishops from the rebellious metropolitan see and created a metropolitan see of India under his direct authority, which was later confirmed by Patriarch Timothy I (in office 780–823).[92]

Although Kerala is now home to about 300 churches, no structures survive from the first millennium, since they have all been rebuilt or newly constructed after the fifteenth century. The few exceptions are the ruins of a church on Socotra;[93] a 'Nestorian' cross carved into a pillar in the ancient royal city of Anuradpura on Sri Lanka;[94] a handful of gravestones in Kerala, such as that of Manarcad from 910; the approximately three-metre-high stone cross in front of the Church of St Mary in Kuravalangad; and at least five relief-type stone crosses, about 80 to 100 centimetres high and 60 to 80 centimetres wide.[95] Another cross was dug up by the Portuguese in 1547 in Mylapore. These crosses are of two types, and examples of both can be found in the Valiya Palli Church in Kottayam, built in 1550, which belongs today to the Syrian Orthodox Church. They were taken from a much older church in Cranganore. The smaller stone cross, from the sixth to ninth centuries, stands in the altar of the



The second copper plate from c. 849, found in the patriarchal see of the Mar Thoma Church in Tiruvalla. The plate is inscribed on only one side in the Old Tamil language and Vatellatu script.

northern side aisle, and the somewhat larger one, from the tenth century, stands in the southern side aisle. The same Pahlavi (Middle Persian) inscription runs along the outer edge of each cross. It reads: 'Who believes in the Messiah and God above and in the Holy Ghost is redeemed through the grace of Him who bore the cross.' The second cross features a second inscription, written in Estrangela and taken from the Letter to the Galatians (6:14): 'Let me not glorify except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.'[96]

Still more important are two documents, written on a total of six copper tablets, of which five have survived. Two of these are found in the patriarchal palace of the Mar Thoma church in Tiruvalla, and three are held by the Malankar Orthodox-Syrian church of Kottayam. The older document acknowledges that in 774 King Vira Raghava Chakravati granted the following privileges to the Christian Iravi Korttan from Cranganore: he was named leader of the traders' guild and 'lord of the city' and had the right 'to charge a broker's commission and customs duty on all that can be weighed, measured and counted'. Additionally, he could carry a sword, employ personal messengers and use such princely insignia as a litter and a 'royal parasol'. The rights 'are passed down to his son and his son's son, as long as sun and moon exist'. This document is inscribed in the Old Tamil language and mixed Tamil-Grantha script, written on both sides along the length of the tablet.[97] The wording of this document makes clear that this Christian family was considered equal to the second highest Indian caste, the warrior nobles.

In the second document, from 849 (or 824), the time of the South Indian king Stanu Ravi, Governor Atikal Tiruvatkial extended to the Terisa church of Kollam (Quilon), which had been founded in 824 by Marvan Sapir-Iso, the privilege of taxation and sole jurisdiction over a certain number of subject families. The name Marvan Sapir-Iso is a corruption of the Syrian episcopal title Mar and the name Sabrisho, which means *Jesus is my hope*. The document confirms a later tradition from the sixteenth/seventeenth centuries, which recounts the arrival of the bishops Mar Sabrisho and Mar Piruz in Quilon. The Christians also maintained in a specific area the privilege of levying customs duties, authority over measurement and administration of the royal seal. An additional document contains further details and states that one established the borders of this transferred region by means of a ceremony in which a female elephant was led along these boundaries.[98] The names of the witnesses are marked on both sides of a tablet in Arabic, using the Kufic script, in Pahlavi and in Judaeo-Persian (Persian in Hebrew script). Older sources mention additional tablets, but these have been lost.

III From Diversity to Unity: Church Fathers and Heretics

'For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part.'

St Paul, First Letter to the Corinthians 13:9

The concept of the Trinity and the question of the nature of Christ

Metaphorically speaking, at the start of the second century the edifice of Christianity stood as little more than a great scaffolding, having neither a structured clergy, nor defined symbols, nor a generally accepted canon of the teachings of Jesus, nor a common understanding of God. Most of the construction remained to be done. Numerous architects, with varied visions and blueprints, contributed to the work. In contrast to Manichaeism, in which the religion's founder himself recorded the fundamentals of his doctrine, and Islam, in which the text of the divine revelation was put in its definitive form about twenty years after the death of the prophet, the corresponding process in Christianity, in which the 'discovery of the truth' drew on the work of the Church Fathers, synods, councils and excommunications, lasted for nearly half a millennium.[1] As a consequence of this slow development of Christian orthodoxy, many divergent doctrines emerged and were declared heresies. Without orthodoxy, no heresy could arise.

The nucleus of fission within the Christian faith community lay in the concept of the Trinity, which signified a watering down of strict Hebrew monotheism.[2] In light of the fundamental importance of the saving work of Christ and his central position in early Christian worship,

Christians could not fall back on the Hebrew transcendence of God but, rather, had to reconsider the relationship of Christ to the God of the Bible. Is there one God – or three? How were the relationships of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to one another to be understood? Was there a hierarchy within the Trinity?

These Trinitarian questions led, necessarily, to questions of Christology, the centrifugal force which broke Christian unity into three mutually antagonistic ecclesiastical organizations and pushed the Church of the East, in the view of the West, into the realm of heresy. At the heart of the matter lay the question of the nature of Christ: was he God or man or both? In the last case, how were the two natures connected? Did both suffer and die on the cross? Equally hotly disputed was the evaluation of the Jewish Bible, to whose prophecies Christianity appealed but whose Jewish interpretation it rejected. Was the spirit of the Jewish Bible at all compatible with the teachings of Jesus?

In the following section, we will discuss only those divergent doctrines relevant to understanding the East Syrian creeds. Since the questions of the Trinity and of the nature of Christ are so closely related to each other, we will consider them together until the moment of the Council of Constantinople. The doctrine of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the outstanding Church Father of the Church of the East, and Manichaeism will be handled separately.[3]

The path to the creed of Chalcedon shows the discovery of the permanent compromise between the two Christological extremes. One extreme overemphasizes the humanity of Christ and led towards the end of the fourth century to the Antiochene school of thought. The other extreme tends to exaggerate the divinity of Christ and neglect the human dimension, and it spawned the Alexandrian theology.

Jesus is foremost man, not God

In the struggle over the understanding of the Trinity, one group of theologians feared that a Trinitarian belief in Father, Son and Holy Spirit would necessarily lead to tritheism, the belief in three subjects, each with its own consciousness and will. Beginning in the second century, the *Monarchianists*, who were very concerned about monotheism, represented the doctrine of the sole sovereignty (monarchy) of the one God. They incorporated Christ in two different ways, both of which were deemed heretical because they denied the independence of the Son. *Dynamic Monarchianism* proceeded from the assumption that the man Jesus was first filled with divine power (Dynamis), in the form of a dove, at his baptism in the Jordan, at which point God adopted the man Jesus as Christ. Appealing to Jesus's exclamation while on the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?',[4] proponents of *Adoptionism*, such as Paul of Samosata (†272), taught that the human Jesus suffered and died on the cross, but the divinity of Christ did not. Since Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius also taught that the human body of Christ, not God, died on the cross, both of these East Syrian Church Fathers were condemned as heretical Adoptionists – an accusation against which Nestorius resolutely defended himself.[5] A view similar to dynamic Monarchianism was propounded by the ascetic Jewish-Christian sect called the *Ebionites*. For them, Jesus was the human son of Mary and Joseph and was made divine only by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at his baptism in the Jordan. *Modalistic Monarchianism*, however, declared that both Christ and the Holy Spirit were modalities of God, which essentially eliminated the humanity of Jesus. This will be clarified in the next section.

Much more important than these trends was Arianism, which enjoyed great popularity in the

fourth century and nearly destroyed the unity of the Church. The priest Arius (c. 250–336), who was active in Alexandria, was a student of Lucian of Antioch (†312), one of the fathers of the historical biblical exegesis of the school of Antioch. The starting point of Arius's doctrine was belief in the absolute transcendence of God and the Neo-Platonic principle that there must be a substantive and hierarchical distinction between a begetter, God the Father, and the begotten, Christ. God the Father and Christ are not alike in essence. Christ is not, in essence, God, but rather he is called divine only on account of his unconditional obedience to the Father and is subordinate to him. In a letter, Arius maintained: 'The Son had a beginning, but God is without beginning.'[6] Since there could not be two uncreated first principles – this would require the acknowledgement of two Gods – Christ was part of temporal creation, the most perfect creature. And so Arius reached his famous formula: 'There was a time when he was not.'[7] This statement diminishing the status of Christ had been anticipated by Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria (c. 200–265) when he wrote, 'Before he came to be, he was not.'[8] Like Arius, Dionysius wanted to preserve both the transcendence of God and the independence of Christ. Like the later Theodore of Mopsuestia, Arius was convinced of the free will of Christ, which theoretically included the possibility of sin.[9] However, since Arius taught neither the full divinity nor the full humanity of Christ – Christ appears as a sort of subordinate demigod – Nestorius strongly opposed him.

Although the First Ecumenical Council of Nicea condemned Arianism in 325, it spread throughout the empire, not least in the patriarchate of Antioch and among the Goths. While the council, under pressure from the emperor, defined the relationship of Christ to God the Father as 'of the *same* substance' (homousios), many bishops preferred the less restrictive concept of a '*similar* substance' (homoiusios). The Gothic bishop Wulfila (311–382) adopted this position and said of the Trinity: 'The Holy Spirit is neither God nor Lord, but rather the loyal servant of Christ, not equal to him but rather subject and obedient to him in all things; and the Son is likewise in all things subject and obedient to his God, the Father.'[10] This formula was affirmed at the Councils of Rimini and Seleucia in 359/60, but again rejected at the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople. The orthodoxy of Nicea was taken up in the formulation of the three Cappadocian Fathers. They attributed an equality of substance to Christ and God the Father and defined God as one substance in three hypostases.[11]

Despite this renewed condemnation of Arianism, it had adherents in the Eastern Roman Empire until the fifth century. It was for Nestorius, of all people, that this state of affairs had particularly bitter consequences. In his sermon on the occasion of his consecration as patriarch of Constantinople on 10 April 428, he threw down the gauntlet before the Arians by addressing Emperor Theodosius II with these words: 'Emperor, give me your kingdom purified of the [Arian] heretics, and I will give you in return the Kingdom of Heaven.'[12] The Arian partisans, thus provoked, preferred to burn down their own church rather than to hand it over to the new patriarch. The fire spread to neighbouring houses, and an entire quarter of Constantinople went up in flames, leading to great unrest. Nestorius's inaugural sermon literally turned into an inflammatory oration. The situation was that much more explosive because all the Gothic soldiers stationed in Constantinople were Arian. Although the soldiers remained in their barracks, Nestorius had on his very first day in office incurred the anger of the Byzantine military leadership and a segment of the nobility.

Jesus is foremost God, not man

Like *dynamic Monarchianism*, *modalistic Monarchianism* was concerned about a strict monotheism. At the start of the second century Sabellius developed this position and taught that the one God acted in different ways (modalities): as Father he was Creator; as Son he was Redeemer; and as Holy Spirit he inspired humanity. This doctrine of *Sabellianism*, which Tertullian fought and Pope Callixtus (in office 217–222) condemned, led to *Patripassianism*, according to which the one God necessarily suffered and died on the cross – a heresy fiercely condemned by the theology of the Church of the East. A comparable view, closer to that of the Church of the East, is represented by Tertullian (160–225) when he wrote about the divine and the human in Jesus: 'We see a doubled nature, not mixed, but connected in one person, God and the human being Jesus.' According to this formulation, the suffering on the cross affected only the human nature of Jesus, not the divine, since 'God cannot suffer'.[13]

A more or less clear tendency towards Docetism is shared by those doctrines that exaggerate the divine nature of Christ to the detriment of his humanity. Docetism is understood as the view that the human dimension of Christ and his suffering were merely apparent, not real, and he possessed only the appearance of a body.

In 144 the bishop's son Marcion was summoned before the presbyterium of Rome – the association of priests – in order to clarify his interpretation of the *parable of the old wineskins*.[14] Instead of the usual moral interpretation, Marcion presented a historical one: the new wine symbolizes the teachings of Jesus, the old wineskins the teachings of the Jews and Jewish scripture.[15] At the conclusion of this confrontation the presbyterium expelled Marcion from the Christian community, whereupon he founded his own, ascetically oriented Church, which spread like wildfire. He created a strictly organized clergy, in which the offices of priest and bishop were open to women.[16] This rival Church remained active in the West until the end of the fourth century and east of the Euphrates until the seventh/eighth centuries, as one can see in the attacks of Nestorian theologians from this time.

Marcionism resolved the dilemma of evil in the world by means of a divine dualism and considered the Good News of Jesus a radical re-evaluation of all Jewish values. The Christian God of love could never be identified with the angry and punitive God of the law. The God of the Jews created the evil world and ruled it with his unmerciful law. The Good News, by contrast, teaches the distant God of love and mercy, who revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Jesus put on a subtle, apparent body and allowed himself to be put on the cross by the evil demiurge, thus redeeming humanity from the grasp of this demiurge. Since Marcion read the Jewish Bible from a strict historical perspective and rejected allegorical exegesis, he reached the conclusion that it was comprehensible only in a Jewish context and thus meaningless for a Christian. Since Jesus prevailed over Mosaic Law, the Jewish scriptures have become irrelevant. Thus Marcion dismissed the Jewish Bible as the *Old Testament* and replaced it with his *New Testament*. This included the Gospel of Luke, as well as ten Pauline letters, which he purified of supposed Jewish adulterations. Acting out of his fundamental Docetism, he also expunged references to Jesus's youth, baptism and resurrection.

With his theses, Marcion forced the orthodox Church to take a position and define itself in a corpus of its own. The flood of anti-Marcion writings is evidence not only of the danger this rival Church represented but also of the relevance of his theological discourse. Among these 'orthodox' fundamental decisions were the identification of God the Father with the Creator God, the recognition of the Jewish heritage of Christianity and thus of the Jewish scriptures, the

The church of Dehez in Syria may be one of the extremely rare Marcionite churches left. On the basis of an inscription found on the lintel of the baptistery, the philologist and diplomat Henri Pognon believed that the nave and the baptistery belonged to a Marcionite church, which was converted into a Christian church in the fifth century.[16]

rejection of dualism, the concept of one canon in two testaments, and, most importantly, the development of its own New Testament.[17] This last was brought about first by Tatian.

Tatian (c. 110 – 180) faced the same task as Marcion: he needed to select orthodox works from the various gospels and letters of apostles then in circulation. He chose a method of reduction and around the year 170 assembled from the parallel works of the four Evangelists a Gospel harmony in the form of a running narrative of the life of Jesus, the *Diatessaron.* The Greek word means 'from four', indicating that he based his harmony exclusively on the four canonical gospels. The Syriac or Greek original has been lost. The oldest extant fragment, in Greek, came from Dura Europas and thus must be dated earlier than 256.[18] The Diatessaron was very popular among Syrian Christians and so also in the Church of the East, in which it made an essential contribution to the spread of Christianity. It was only finally superseded at the beginning of the fifth century by the Tetragospels of the Peshitta.[19]

It is not without irony that the editor of the Diatessaron, some two years after the completion of his work, was condemned as a heretic. The cause of this was the strict asceticism, called Encratism, which he promoted. According to Tatian's view, for instance, marriage was incompatible with the attainment of eternal life; only chaste Christians were true Christians.[20] Independent of the question of whether the Encratites were heretical or orthodox Christians, they stood as the model for Syrian monasticism.

Much evidence supports the claim that Christian asceticism arose not in Egypt – St Anthony renounced the world only around 285 – but rather an entire century earlier, in northern Mesopotamia.[21]

Like his contemporary Tatian, Bardaisan (154–222), who was active in Edessa (one of the strongholds of Marcionism) battled the heresy of Marcion and likewise ended up a heretic. He emphasized the unity of the Christian God with the Creator God and that creation was good, that no taint of evil was inherent in matter. In contrast to Tatian, he rejected radical asceticism and acknowledged human free will.[22] For Bardaisan, human beings, created in the image of God, possess a free will, which distinguishes them from the sun, moon and stars, as these are necessarily beholden to the laws of nature. Human beings can also overcome the influence of the stars – Bardaisan was very interested in astrological matters – and of fate. 'If he [the human being] were so created that he could do no evil and thus could not receive blame, then the good that he did would also not be his own. For if he cannot do good or evil out of his own will, innocence or blame belongs to the fate that controls him.'[23] Bardaisan denied the position that human beings were sinful by nature and thus anticipated a central aspect of East Syrian anthropology. 'It follows, then, that we human beings are governed by nature in the same way and by fate in various ways, but, by means of our free will, each does as he chooses.'[24]

Bardaisan, who likewise had his own edition of the Gospel text, which cannot be reconstructed today,[25] took an interest in Chaldean astrology and its dualistic cosmogony. Like the later Mani, Bardaisan saw creation as the result of a mixing of good with evil. The path to freeing the soul from the prison of the body – that is, the sifting out of the good from the impure – passes over observance of God's law.[26] As a sign supporting the principle of the good, Bardaisan's followers wore white.[27] Bardaisan's plan for salvation excluded the resurrection of the body, and his dualism made him a Docetist, since he taught that Jesus had no true body, as such a body would have been impure. Although Bardaisan adopted essential elements of Zoroastrianism, he, unlike Marcion, maintained belief in one God, as well as in the Trinity, which he understood as God the Father, Christ the Saviour and the Holy Spirit.[28]

The image of a female Holy Spirit was not uncommon in early Eastern Christian communities; we find this, for instance, in the Odes of Solomon in a Christian Gnostic hymnbook from the early third century and in the work of Aphrahat. In relation to the question of whether a man can serve two masters, namely God and wife, he concluded, 'As long as a man has taken no wife, he loves and honours God his Father and the Holy Spirit his Mother and has no other attachment.'[29]

Besides the Marcionites, Apollinarius of Laodicea and Christian Gnosticism were important exponents of Docetic theology. *Gnosticism* was not a unified doctrine but, rather, more like an eclectic world-view that appeared in the guise of various religions. Its philosophical kernel is found in Plato's *Phaidon* and *Politeia*, according to which our earthly world represents merely the shadowy reflection of the real world of ideas.[30] As a consequence of their disagreement with Zoroastrianism and Jewish apocalypticism, Gnostic thinkers radicalized the dualism implicit in Plato's approach into the maximum alienation of the human being from the world and from him- or herself. The world and the human body no longer represented 'only' a false reflection of true reality but rather were both the wretched work of an evil and inferior demiurge. Only the pneuma, the spark of the soul, has the desire and also the possibility to leave the world of darkness and rise up to the highest God. Here knowledge of one's own nature, gnosis, serves as the means of salvation; in Christian Gnosticism, Christ takes on the task of calling the chosen and leading them

to the saving knowledge. Christian Gnostics of the second century, such as, e.g., Satoril, Carpocrates, Cerdon and, above all, Cerinth, distinguished not only between the inferior Creator God and the distant, highest God, but also between the mortal Jesus and the impassible Christ.[31] As has been mentioned, East Syrian Christology reaches a comparable conclusion, although it begins with entirely different assumptions and uses different concepts. While it emphasizes the ontological unity of Christ, it also states, like Greek Orthodoxy, that he suffered and died as man, not as God.

Christian theologians such as Tertullian (c.160–225), Irenaeus (c.140–202) and Hippolytus (c.170–236) argued against the Gnostics as follows. There is only one God, who created the world, which is inherently good, so the acceptance of a second, inferior, demiurge is absurd. Yet more absurd are the cosmological speculations of the Gnostics and their conviction that the path of salvation led not over the redeeming work of Christ carried out on the cross but rather over a secret knowledge accessible to only a small elite. The salvation of Christ is not restricted to an elite but, rather, is open to all people who believe in him and his message. It should also be noted that, although early Christianity overcame Gnosticism, it was nonetheless influenced by its disparagement of and contempt for the material and corporeal. Like numerous adherents of Marcion and Bardaisan, many Gnostics found a new home in Manichaeism from the mid-third century onwards.

The doctrine of Apollinarius of Laodicea (c.310–390), which was directed against Arianism, had significant consequences for the history of early Christianity and for the patriarchate of Antioch. Bishop Apollinarius, together with his theological opponent, the Church Father Diodore of Tarsus (†392), was one of the first to shift the focus of the theological debate on the Trinity to the understanding of the nature(s) of Christ. He was concerned about the Diodoran approach of a two-nature doctrine of Christ, called dyophysitism, since this threatened the conceptual unity of Christ, so he suggested a new way. Like most theologians of his time, Apollinarius subscribed to the Platonic view that the human being consisted of body, soul and spirit (will). Applying this model to Jesus, Apollinarius objected above all to Arius's opinion that Jesus's will would have been able to sin. In order to protect the fundamental sinlessness of Jesus, he declared that in Jesus the divine Logos took the place of a human will. Thus Apollinarius denied Jesus the experience of moral development, since the Word-made-flesh was perfect and unchangeable.[32]

As will be explained below,[33] the Asian Greeks Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who are recognized as Church Fathers by the East Syrians, opposed this approach, since in it the human nature of Christ all but withered away. If one followed Apollinarian doctrine, Christ possessed only a human body and a human soul, but no human spirit. In this case, Jesus had no authentic human nature, which called into question his saving work, since the salvation of humanity presumed the full acceptance of human nature by Christ. Although the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople condemned the teaching of Apollinarius in 381, the *Miaphysite* (one-nature) formula of the bishop of Laodicea remained in circulation and laid the groundwork in the middle of the next century for the extreme monophysitism of Eutyches (378–454).

Since Christianity was, by 381/392 at the latest, the state religion of the Roman Empire, conciliar decisions served as civil laws, as soon as the emperor ratified them. Local bishops were the first to perceive this, as they were obligated to uphold the opinions declared orthodox by the councils. Opposition to conciliar pronouncements led to civil sanctions; dissenting bishops were sent into exile and replaced with orthodox ones. However, since the bishops often had at their disposal a strong following, dismissal by force could not be carried out immediately, for

the threat of revolt was too great. This was all the truer when, in the traditional hotbeds of unrest in the patriarchs of Alexandria and Antioch, an anti-Byzantine nationalistic reflex arose. During the tumult of that time there were many casualties, and, in the case of the Melkite patriarch of Alexandria, Proterios, even murder: an angry mob killed the unfortunate patriarch in 457 in the baptistery of his cathedral.[34] Other prominent victims were Flavian, the deposed archbishop of Constantinople, who was so badly injured by monks and soldiers at the so-called 'Robber Synod' of 449 that he died of his wounds three days later; and Bishop Severian of Scythopolis, who was murdered in 451 on the return from Chalcedon.[35] For these reasons, in the large cities communities often remained divided, each with their own clergy and their own churches. Although canon law assigned only one bishop per city, for a time Antioch had four vying for power! It was in this patriarchate that the battles between Miaphysites, Dyophysites and Melkites loyal to the emperor raged most fiercely.

However, the intensity of these theological disputes – unimaginable to us in the twenty-first century – cannot be explained just on the basis of political circumstances. As W. Klein has aptly stated, at that time 'dogma was not yet the specialized science of a few theologians, but rather the stuff of everyday conversation, and it resembled modern disputes over party politics'.[36] Finally, the question arose of whether Christian dogma could be brought into agreement with the scholarship of the time – that is, Hellenistic philosophy. Of concern was the project of describing and clarifying Christian doctrine, particularly the incarnation of Christ, with the help of philosophical concepts. The solutions worked out in this formative period remained valid in their important characteristics until the early Renaissance, when the redefinition of the parameters of scholarship radically called into question the alleged compatibility of scholarship and Christianity. A critical retrospective of two millennia of Christology also reminds us that it always remains 'Christo-Logy', human talk about Jesus Christ, which is embedded in the social, cultural and political context of its time.

Christianity becomes the Roman state Church

There are various dates that could mark the start of Christianity as the Roman state Church. In 312, after his victory in the battle of the Milvian Bridge, Emperor Constantine I (ruled 312–337) declared himself a Christian; in the following year he proclaimed the Edict of Milan, which guaranteed religious freedom.[37] Since the emperor pronounced the Christian god as his god, this god was elevated, *eo ipso*, to the god of the empire. With Emperor Theodosius I (ruled 379–395), the process of the Christianization of the Roman state, begun with Emperor Constantine, led to a nationalization of the Church when, in 381, he forbade the conversion from Christianity to another religion and then, ten years later, put an end to all pagan worship within the empire and had the pagan temples destroyed or turned into churches. However, Constantine's successors had already banned pagan sacrifices in 341, and in 346 had decreed the closing of pagan temples, although in 361 Emperor Julian the Apostate (ruled 361–363) undertook the last, unsuccessful, attempt to create a Christian–pagan synthesis and had the closed temples reopened.[38]

It is hardly surprising that the Christian Church first expressed thanks for its sudden recognition as the state religion with a certain submissiveness and gladly accepted 'golden chains' in the form of financial support from the state. Because Constantine wanted to defend the threatened unity of the empire with a common religion, he laid great importance on the unity of doctrine within the Church – thus setting an example for

his successors. For this reason, he convened the Synod of Rome in 313 to resolve the problem of the North African Donatists and the Council of Nicea in 325 to stem the tide of Arianism. The extent to which the ecclesiastical leadership made concessions to the emperor is shown by the following decision of the Council of Arles from 314: 'Those who surrender their weapons in peacetime shall not take communion.'[39] Official Christianity had deviated so significantly from the radical pacifism of Jesus that it excluded from the Eucharist those who refused military service!

The Council of Nicea also established the division of the Church into metropolitan sees, which assigned the bishops of their respective provinces. Rome was the metropolitan see for the West, Alexandria for Egypt and Libya, and Antioch for the parts of Asia belonging to the Roman Empire. The Council of Constantinople of 381 granted the metropolitan see of Constantinople precedence over those of Antioch and Alexandria, since Constantinople was the 'new Rome'.[40] The primacy of the bishop of Rome, however, established under Pope Damasus (in office 366–384), remained unchanged.[41] Finally, in 451, the Council of Chalcedon elevated Jerusalem to a patriarchal see as well, thus creating the so-called pentarchy. It was made up of five patriarchates, listed here by rank: Rome, Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem.[42] However, the pentarchy applied only to the Christian world within the empire and pertained to neither the autonomous Churches beyond the imperial borders, such as, e.g., that of Armenia or the Church of the East, nor the Arian Churches of the Germanic peoples, such as, e.g., the Goths and Vandals. With the Arab conquest of Egypt and the Middle East in the seventh century, the patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem lost most of their importance.

The decrees of Theodosius brought an end to religious freedom in the Roman Empire, and the Council of Constantinople, which he convened, established the creed of Nicea as universally valid. Now theological discourse was subject to state censorship. The closing of the school of philosophers in Athens in 529 further reduced freedom of opinion, and as a consequence the West gradually lost its Hellenistic heritage. Heterodox Christians and pagans were from then on abominable criminals, who had to be dealt with by civil justice. The persecution of heterodox Christians began on a large scale in 431 with the oppression of the followers of Nestorius in the patriarchate of Antioch, and reached a tragic zenith with the Inquisition. It was again the Nestorians who, towards the end of the Inquisition, fell victim to it; in 1599 the Nestorian Thomas Christians of Kerala were forcibly converted to Catholicism by the Inquisition and had their entire written heritage burned.

A jubilee address of the church historian Eusebius of Caesarea reveals the emperor's vision of close ties between the Church and the civil power structure. In it Eusebius lauds the emperor as the earthly likeness of the heavenly ruler, on whose behalf he rules.[43] He thus anticipated the instrumentalization of Buddhism practised by several dynasties in ancient China, according to which the emperor was the likeness of the Buddha Vairocana or Maitreya and his representative on Earth.[44] This vision of Emperor Constantine also explains his personal interest in the defeat of Arianism, since it threatened his position as the divinely blessed emperor. If Jesus was, in the end, merely a human being adopted by God, what special claim could the emperor make? Despite its proximity to worldly power, the Church did not allow itself to be reduced to a handmaiden of the state. The institution of the papacy prevented a union of personnel of ecclesiastical and civil power and established an unstable balance between the two authorities, which was continually being redefined. Thanks to this relative independence and the fact that the emperor no longer lived in Rome, the Church was barely affected by the collapse of the Western

Roman Empire. The shift of the imperial capital to Constantinople in 330 freed the bishop of Rome from the threat of state control.

In short order, Christianity's elevation to Roman state religion brought to the fore the explosive question of the status of those Christians who lived outside the imperial borders, especially if they belonged to states hostile to Rome. The Christians east of the Euphrates soon learned the painful answer.[45]

The foundations of East Syrian theology

The Church Fathers Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia

The attempt to define the nature of Jesus Christ is a truly Herculean labour, for it requires finding a common denominator between the mutually exclusive concepts of complete God and complete man. In addressing this question, the choice of starting point has a decisive effect on the chain of reasoning. At that time, as Nestorius noted, the theologians of the Eastern patriarchates, who argued about a Christological creed, were adherents of either the School of Antioch or the School of Alexandria. Supporters of the former proceeded from the historical person of Jesus, as he is portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels, and then tried to understand how this man Jesus could simultaneously be God. The latter group, by contrast, began with the Word of God from the prologue of the Gospel of John and tried to understand what it meant that the Word became flesh.[46] The former laid the greatest significance on the wholeness of the human dimension of Jesus, while the latter emphasized his divinity. Because the Antiochenes spoke of two complete natures of Christ, they were called *Dyophysites* (from the Greek 'dyo' and 'physis', two and natures); the Alexandrians, on the other hand, were called *Monophysites* ('one' and 'nature') or *Miaphysites*, since they taught a union of the two natures.[47] Because the non-Chalcedonian churches, such as the Syrian Orthodox and Coptic Church, reject the description 'monophysite', as it more accurately suits the one-nature doctrine of Eutyches, we will use the term 'miaphysite', which they adopted from the Mia-Physis formula used by Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria.[48] The Western patriarch of Rome finally referred to Tertullian, who spoke of two natures in one person of Christ and thus stood close to the Antiochene position.

The term 'School of Antioch' ought not be understood as designating an unchanging doctrinal position but rather a certain method of biblical interpretation, strongly marked by reflections on the nature of Jesus. The school of thought of Antioch proceeded along text-critical and historical lines, paying close attention to the literal words of Scripture, in contrast to the School of Alexandria, which interpreted the Bible allegorically. The exegetes of Antioch were influenced by the Greek bishops Diodore of Tarsus (†392) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (352–428), who both belonged to the patriarchate of Antioch and wrote in the struggle against the Miaphysite position of Apollinarius. Diodore's first principle was: 'We strongly prefer the historical to the allegorical.'[49] By contrast, allegorical exegesis, developed by Clement (c. 150–215) and Origen (c. 185–254), looked behind the biblical text for another, second, sense, which had no inherent connection to the literal content, as is the case with symbols. Roughly speaking, the exegesis of Antioch is rational, synoptic and Aristotelian, and that of Alexandria is mystical-allegorical, Platonic and Johannine.

As far as Christology is concerned, it is obvious that historical exegesis emphasizes the human dimension of Christ and thus favours a sharp distinction between the divine and human natures. It was necessary to avoid the later Miaphysite position, the belief that, in Christ,

'the humanity was absorbed by the divinity, like a drop of honey dissolved in the sea'.[50] Eustathius of Antioch (†337) stands as founder of the historical Christological approach. He characterized Christ as a 'God-bearing man', who freely decided to obey the wish of God the Father and take upon himself death on the cross.[51] Thus, as the human being, acting out of free will, either obeys the law of God or turns away from Him and commits sin, Jesus Christ took upon himself the work of salvation.

That the salvation of humanity is impossible without Christ's full possession of human nature and the simultaneous preservation of his full divinity was also the conviction of the powerfully eloquent bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom (347–407). 'Hell will spit out those who assert that our Lord Jesus Christ [after the union of the two natures] has only one nature. Now, which nature do they destroy? If the divine, then there is no salvation. If the human, then humanity loses all hope of eternal life.'[52] The significance of the absolute wholeness of both natures in Christ is evident when seen against the background of belief in *bodily* salvation, which plays a central role in the Syrian Churches in general and in the Church of the East in particular. Its essence consists in the human being approaching and approximating the divine, a concept which unimaginably raises the value of humanity. St Athanasius (292–373) neatly expressed the idea that God's becoming flesh implied the divinization of human beings: 'He [the Word of God] became man, so that we might become God.'[53]

For the teachers of the School of Antioch, the wholeness of the two natures represented the fundamental assumption for the work of salvation. As John Chrysostom had stated, only the complete, unmixed divinity possessed the power to save, and only the complete humanity enabled the divinization of human beings. Although the humanity of Christ was for a time subject to the human being's own limits and weaknesses, he redeemed them with the resurrection and granted to them the attributes of divinity. He thus opened the way for human beings to do like him.

Even though Diodore underlined the wholeness of the humanity of Jesus and his soul, he also maintained his complete divinity; for him, the two natures exist side by side, without mixing. As a consequence of the presumed separation, Diodore could attribute a moral development to the human soul of Jesus, which attained perfection by means of the action of the Holy Spirit in his baptism in the Jordan, and could, at the same time, avoid ascribing suffering and death to the divinity. He thus opposed the so-called Theopaschites, who attributed suffering and death to the Son of God. 'We will not allow ourselves to be misled into believing that the God Logos suffered. It was rather the child of Mary, to whom sonship was granted, the temple of the God-Logos, who was destroyed by the Jews, from which, however, the one who lived therein arose.'[54] It is clear from this statement that, for Diodore, one suffered death and another rose from it – an idea which runs as a leitmotif through Nestorian Christology. On this matter he could rely on Athanasius, the leading Church Father at the Council of Nicea. Since 'it was impossible for the Word to suffer death, being immortal, the Son of the Father takes to himself a body capable of death'.[55] The image of the indwelling of the divine nature in the visible person of Jesus was very popular among the Nestorians. As the fourteenth-century *Book of the Tower* maintained, 'The divinity and the humanity were united in the visible temple [Jesus].' In another passage we can read the following poetic metaphor: 'God sent his Word in a paper wrapping, which was the human being [Jesus], to show humanity the path of faith.'[56] The crux of this approach is found in the definition of how the two natures, the Son of God and the

human Jesus, relate to one another, insofar as they remain whole and unmixed, for here lies the danger of a loss of the ontological unity of Christ.

Diodore's student Theodore of Mopsuestia further developed the Christology of Antioch and stands as father of East Syrian dogma. Following his teacher, Theodore tried to understand the unity of Christ as an indwelling of the Word of God. 'God wanted to clothe himself in humanity, which was fallen, and raise it up again – he, made up of a body and an immortal and rational soul. He took this on for the sake of our salvation and in this way effected salvation for our life.'[57] Like Diodore, Theodore distinguished between the second Person of the Trinity, Christ, the only-begotten Son of God the Father, and the son of Mary, Jesus of the House of David. As a consequence of this distinction, the discussion of the definition of Mary flared up, contributing decisively to Nestorius's unfortunate fate.

With Theodore, the foundations of East Syrian theology were laid. First, the conviction that Christ is the Second Adam, who, by taking on a complete human nature, overcame death for all human beings. Like Paul, Theodore and Nestorius derived from this the obligation on the part of Christians to imitate the perfect life of the historical Jesus. This view led to the question of which criteria true Christians must fulfil in order to receive the sacraments. For instance, is celibacy required, since Jesus had lived chastely?[58] Second, such human qualities as suffering and death could not be ascribed to the divine nature of Christ, and, third, the full humanity of Jesus Christ was emphasized.[59]

Like the later Nestorius and Nestorian Christology in general, Theodore appeared vulnerable to the accusation of supporting a two-son doctrine. 'But they [Theodore's opponents] invent charges that, if we speak of two complete entities, we must also speak of two sons. But we do not speak of two sons, one son is properly recognized, as the separation of the natures must remain necessary and the union of the prosopon [person] must be preserved without confusion.'[60] Although, shortly after the Council of Ephesus in 431, the teachings of Diodore and Theodore fell under suspicion of containing heretical ideas, both 'Nestorian' Church Fathers were regarded as orthodox in their own day. More than a century later, in 553, the Fifth Ecumenical Council, acting for political reasons and under pressure from Emperor Justinian, declared as heretical the person and writings of Theodore, which amounted to a condemnation of the entire Church of the East.

Nestorius and the Council of Ephesus

Nestorius as patriarch of Constantinople

In 428, with his appointment as patriarch of Constantinople, the monk Nestorius stepped onto the world stage. As a consequence of his pointed exegesis and ascetic manner, he behaved in Byzantine court politics like the proverbial bull in a china shop. Three years later he was deposed and sent into exile. How did this personal tragedy come to pass, and why did he confer his name upon the Church of the East, of which he was never a member? The main reasons for the failure of his patriarchate lie, on the one hand, in certain character traits of Nestorius – in his uncompromising zeal for orthodoxy as he understood it – and, on the other, in theological formulas that offered opponents room for misunderstanding and opportunities for attack.

Nestorius, born around 382, was of Mesopotamian origin.[61] He studied under the East Syrian Church Father Theodore of Mopsuestia and then entered the nearby monastery of Euprepius, where he received ordination to the priesthood. He soon won a reputation for great eloquence, theological

acuity and ascetic living, which inspired Emperor Theodosius II (ruled 408–450) to summon him to Constantinople as successor to the late Patriarch Sisinnius. Although Theodore cautioned Nestorius about his zeal upon his departure for Constantinople and advised him that the common theological views of Constantinople differed in important respects from those of Antioch, Nestorius attempted, immediately upon his assumption of the office, simultaneously to solve all the problems he discovered. The patriarchate of Constantinople did, in fact, need reform. The upper clergy suffered from internal estrangements, the capital teemed with real and alleged heretics, and the monks, who held ominous political power, led dissipated lives in Constantinople. To make matters worse, the most powerful figure behind the throne was the emperor's sister Pulcheria, who controlled her weak younger brother. However, Pulcheria, of all people, was the patroness of the monks and of Proclus, the candidate Nestorius had defeated. It may be assumed that Theodosius hoped his appointment of the outsider Nestorius would subdue the monks and get him out from under his sister's thumb.

With no power base at his disposal, Nestorius set to work immediately and incautiously. As has already been mentioned, in his inaugural sermon he sharply attacked the supporters of Arius, leading to turmoil in the capital and almost provoking the intervention of the Arian Gothic soldiers. He thus made an enemy of the military leadership. Despite this setback, a month later he compelled the emperor to revoke the freedom of worship for such dissenters as the Arians, Apollinarians, Novatians, Montanists, etc., and to expel the Manichaeans from the cities, which broadened his circle of foes. Next, the new patriarch raised the ire of the local citizenry by banning from the city the theatres, which were as numerous as they were popular – and which also served, in some cases, as striptease clubs and bordellos. Nestorius then tackled the overdue reform of the monks. This was directed at limiting the activities of the monks to their monasteries, breaking their influence over state and Church and forcing them to adopt an ascetic lifestyle. For the monks were hanging around the streets at night, frequenting dives and associating with prostitutes. In this way he not only brought upon himself the hostility of the monks but also got in the sights of Augusta Pulcheria, patroness of the monks. He increased her disapproval by restricting the liturgical prerogatives of women of high standing, which were typical of Byzantium. Among these was the right of these women to participate in vigils held in the churches and in common meals with priests and monks. Finally, he personally insulted the emperor's sister on more than one occasion. Among other offences, he refused to give her Holy Communion within the choir, since only clergy and the emperor were permitted inside it. Her vanity wounded, Pulcheria swore revenge.

The next Pandora's box Nestorius opened was the question of the status of Mary. This was a function of the definition of the nature(s) of Christ. If the accent was placed on the divine nature, the term *Theotokos*, God-bearer, would be proper, but, if it was placed on the human dimension, the characterization *Anthropotokos*, human-bearer, would be more appropriate. In his apologia written during his Egyptian exile, he described how he found this dispute upon his arrival in Constantinople: 'Representatives of both sides came together to the episcopal palace. They sought a resolution of their debate to which both sides could agree. One side acknowledged the term Theotokos, the other Anthropotokos.' Once Nestorius had determined that both parties confessed the divine as well as the human nature of Christ – that is, that their problem was semantic in nature – he proposed: 'Let us hold fast to the Gospel, which states that Christ

Emperor Theodosius II (ruled 408–450) condemns Patriarch Nestorius (382–451), shown in the lower right, as a heretic. On the emperor's right sits Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria, to his right Bishop Memnon of Ephesus (far left of picture from viewer's perspective); on the emperor's left is Pope Celestine I of Rome, to his left Patriarch John of Antioch (far right of picture from viewer's perspective). Post-Byzantine mural in the St Sozomenos Church in Galata, Cyprus, from 1513.

is born, and use the term *Christotokos*, Christ-bearer.'[62] It is clear from Nestorius's remarks that he considered both terms, Theotokos and Anthropotokos, equally legitimate, insofar as they were correctly understood. At the same time, however, the patriarch's chaplain and confidante Anastasius poured oil on the fire by openly attacking the term 'Theotokos' in a sermon on 22 November 428. Since Nestorius failed to correct Anastasius's statement in his advent sermons, the clergy and monks got the impression that Nestorius wanted to impose

Antiochene ideas on Constantinople.

Mary enjoyed a widespread and popular cult, which had first arisen in Egypt. It developed there out of the cult of the goddess Isis and her divine son Horus, which had been extremely popular in the Roman period. In many portrayals of the Madonna, the resemblance to images of Isis, with the infant Horus at her breast, is striking. The highly emotional veneration of the Mother of God represents a Christianization of the Isis cult. This particular form of popular piety was also present in the patriarchate of Constantinople, not only in the capital but also in Ephesus, where it was heir to the ancient cult of Artemis and assimilated the figures of ancient mother goddesses into Christianity.[63] Thus, when Anastasius appeared to attack the cult of the Mother of God and deny the divinity of Christ, indignation raged, and violent unrest again racked the capital. Startled, Nestorius tried to calm things down with a sermon he gave in early 430: 'I have already declared several times that when one of you or someone of a simple [nature] prefers the term Theotokos, I will say nothing against this. Just don't make a goddess out of the Virgin.'[64] Nestorius did not oppose the veneration of Mary but rather the worship of her.

That Nestorius's warning not to idolize Mary was not unjustified is demonstrated by the examples of a Christian nomadic tribe from the Syrian desert, which worshipped Mary as a goddess,[65] and the apocryphal Gospel of the Hebrews, where the following statement of Jesus is found: 'The Saviour said, "Immediately my mother, the Holy Spirit, seized me"'.[66] From the independent cult of Mary and the equating of her with the Holy Spirit, it was but a short step to tritheism, the belief in three gods. Bishop Maruta (†419) referred to a group of Montanists as an example. 'These call the blessed Mary a goddess and say that a heavenly being joined with her and the Son of God was borne by her.'[67] The devolution of the concept of the Trinity, difficult to comprehend intellectually, into the idea, congenial to popular piety, of a familiar trio of gods – God the Father, Mary the Mother, and Jesus as their shared Son – presented a genuine danger in the Mediterranean region, which featured several pagan divine triads.

With regard to theology, Nestorius was less willing to compromise. 'Mary bore a human being, the mediator of divinity, but not God.'[68] In the end, Nestorius could not accept the term 'Theotokos', since it implied a Theopaschite Christology, according to which God was subject to the natural conditions of birth, suffering and death. Beginning with Theodore of Mopsuestia, rejection of the designation 'Theotokos' remained a constant of East Syrian theology. The last great theologian of the Church of the East, the metropolitan of Nisibis Mar Odisho (c.1250–1318), argued rather polemically against this concept. First, if Mary is the mother of God, and this term refers to the Trinity, then Mary is the mother of the Trinity. Second, if Mary is the God-bearer, and Christ is the Son of God, then Mary is the mother of God the Father, and Christ is her grandson.[69]

Nestorius's attempts at appeasement came too late, for he was isolated and opposed by a hostile alliance made up of Pulcheria, the courtiers, the military leadership, the monks and the rabble of the city. This faction sought the lever with which they could prise their disliked bishop from the patriarchal throne. They found it in Cyril, the patriarch of Alexandria, who, for his part, sought a pretext for bringing down Nestorius. More than a year before the Council of Ephesus in the summer of 431, the fate of Patriarch Nestorius was sealed.

The theological dispute with Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria

In 412 Cyril (c. 375–444) succeeded his uncle Theophilus as patriarch of Alexandria. His character was in direct contrast to Nestorius's. Cyril was ambitious and power-hungry, politically savvy and a master schemer, who did not hesitate knowingly to misquote his opponent Nestorius to the pope. Cyril's motivations for using the alliance hostile to Nestorius as an instrument to effect his fall were threefold. First, in 381 the patriarchate of Alexandria was demoted from its position as the second most important patriarchate after Rome to the third, in favour of Constantinople, which aroused great resentment in Alexandria. Second, Cyril strived either to become patriarch of Constantinople or to re-establish Alexandria's former place in the hierarchy. Third, Nestorius's rejection of the term 'Theotokos' represented a provocation for Alexandrians and Egyptians.

Cyril chose the argument that Nestorius's rejection of the designation of the Mother of God showed that he – like Paul of Samosata, who had been condemned as a heretic in 268 – maintained that Jesus was merely a man, whom God later adopted on account of his moral development. On the occasion of the Easter sermon of 429 he publicly charged Nestorius with denying the divinity of Christ. At the same time, an increasingly aggressive correspondence began between the two patriarchs, culminating in twelve extraordinarily sharply formulated anathemas by Cyril against Nestorius. Before we briefly sketch out the relevant arguments, three important philosophical terms – 'nature', 'hypostasis', and 'person' – need to be clarified. Doing so will show that the two adversaries sometimes interpreted the same terms differently.

The fundamental basis is the definition of the Trinity from 381, which speaks of one *usia* – understood as substance – in three hypostases – understood as persons. We can translate the Greek words *usia* and *physis* as 'nature', a universal category, a general and immutable type in the sense of a species. So there is the usia of God or the general species of human being. The Syriac word *kyana* corresponds to the Greek usia. The difficulty began with the term 'hypostasis'. Cyril and most non-Antiochene theologians interpreted the Greek word in the Neo-Platonic sense as a concrete realization of the usia, corresponding to the concrete person. Nestorius, however, when referring to a concrete person, used the term *prosopon*, in Syriac *parsopa*, and inserted the term 'hypostasis', Syriac *qnoma*, in between 'usia' and 'person'. Nestorius and the Church of the East understood the designation 'hypostasis' or 'qnoma' in the Aristotelian sense, as a material reality bound up with its species. The qnoma is an individual, representative realization of its nature, but does not necessarily exist for itself. The qnoma – that is – the hypostasis, is not yet the person, the *prosopon*. The prosopon is defined as the sum of accidental qualities that make the appearances of two hypostases different. Such qualities are, for instance, sex, hair colour, character traits, degree of intelligence, talents, etc. These qualities distinguish Peter from Paul or John from James. Applied to the example of the human being, usia/kyana refers to the general species of human, hypostasis/qnoma to a real, existing realization, and prosopon/parsopa to the appearance of the actual person.[70] In brief, 'person' denotes the external appearance and 'hypostasis' the inner reality.

Both Cyril and Nestorius spoke of a divine and a human nature in Christ, but they differed from one another in the determination of the modality of unity. In his second letter to Nestorius, Cyril wrote, 'Two different natures came together [in Christ] in a hypostatic union, in order to form a unity.'[71] But, because Nestorius defined the term

Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria (375–444). Mural in the Syrian Orthodox monastery of Mar Musa, Syria, twelfth century.

'hypostasis' as a pre-personal reality, the concept of a hypostatic union was unacceptable to him, since he saw this as a mixing of the two natures. Such a mixing endangered the integrity of the human nature and led to the idea that the divine in Christ was subject to such earthly phenomena as birth, suffering and death.[72] For Nestorius it was unthinkable that a usia (nature) could exist in a prosopon without a corresponding hypostasis. He countered Cyril's hypostatic union with the union in the prosopon: 'In Christ two natures and two hypostases are united in the prosopon.' He expanded this formula, which was adopted by the Church of the East, as follows: 'I confess in One Christ two natures without mixing. In his divinity he was brought forth by the Father, in his humanity by the Holy Virgin.'[73]

In the formulation of Babai the Great (551–628), still recognized today, the creed of the Church of the East reads: 'One is Christ, the Son of God, glorified by all in two natures; begotten by the Father without beginning before time; born of Mary in his humanity, united in the fullness of time in one body. His divinity is not of the nature of the mother, nor is his humanity of the nature of the Father. The natures are preserved in their qnome [hypostases] in one person of the one sonship.'[74]

Cyril opposed the formulation of Nestorius: 'He who rejects the hypostatic union commits the error of two Sons.'[75] Since Cyril equated the term 'hypostasis' with the term 'person', the phrase 'in two hypostases' in Nestorius's formulation must have meant, to his mind, 'in two persons', which is heretical. Although the noose slowly tightened around Nestorius, he refused to heed the advice of his mentor, Patriarch John of Antioch, and accept the term 'Theotokos'.[76] By doing so, he could have pulled the rug out from under Cyril's reasoning. Instead, in his second letter to Cyril, he reiterated that 'the Holy Virgin is more properly called Christotokos than Theotokos'.[77] Since Nestorius did not give up, Cyril resorted to a ruse and turned to Pope Celestine I (†432). In his writings he did not hesitate to distort citations from Nestorius's sermons and writings, in order to make them appear as heretical as possible.[78] These libels found in the pope a sympathetic audience; for he was angry that Nestorius had welcomed the condemned adherents of Pelagius in Constantinople.[79] In August 430 Celestine convened a synod in Rome, which condemned Nestorius as a heretical follower of Paul of Samosata and conclusively prescribed use of the term 'Theotokos'. Nestorius had to correct his errors or face deposition.

The synod authorized Cyril to settle the matter. He seized the opportunity and confronted Nestorius with twelve anathemas, which he had ten days to sign or else he would be condemned. These anathemas were so pointedly formulated

that Nestorius could not submit to them without losing his credibility. This is clear from the first two and the final threatened condemnations:

1. One who does not confess Immanuel as the true God and thus the Holy Virgin as God-bearer, because she bore in the flesh the God Logos born of the flesh, is condemned.
2. One who does not confess that the Logos, begotten of God the Father, is hypostatically united with the flesh is condemned.

12. One who does not confess that the Logos God suffered in the flesh and was crucified in the flesh and tasted death in the flesh is condemned.[80]

Nestorius rejected the anathemas as the monstrous product of the condemned doctrine of Apollinarius and demanded that the emperor call a general council, which he did, inviting all the bishops on 7 June 431 to Ephesus. The selection of Ephesus as the location of the council, presumably suggested by Pulcheria, was a bad omen for Nestorius. The city lived from the veneration of the Mother of God, which was heir to the pagan cult of Artemis. For this reason, the local bishop Memnon was an ardent supporter of the term 'Theotokos' and a bitter opponent of his patriarch.

Nestorius's removal as patriarch

The Third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus was an undignified event. Egyptian monks and sailors ran wild in the streets and threatened supporters of the patriarch. An additional and, indeed, decisive misfortune for Nestorius was the late arrival of the bishops of the patriarchate of Antioch, as well as the imperial and papal delegations. Against the protest of 68 bishops, Cyril opened the council on 22 June with 'his' – in some cases demonstrably bribed – bishops. Since he was leader of the council, Cyril functioned simultaneously as prosecutor and judge. In light of these circumstances, Nestorius, who was present in Ephesus, refused to participate in this biased council. The correspondence between the two opponents was read aloud, and within days, and without discussion, Nestorius was condemned *in absentia* as a heretic and relieved of his office.[81] The decision was made known to Nestorius in writing. 'The holy council, meeting in Ephesus by the grace of God and at the behest of our pious and Christ-loving emperor, informs Nestorius, the new Judas: know that, on account of your impious doctrines and disobedience to the canons, you have been condemned by the holy synod after the findings of the ecclesiastical determinations on 22 June of the current month of June, and you have forfeited all ecclesiastical titles.'[82]

When the bishops of Antioch, under the leadership of their patriarch, John, arrived in Ephesus on 26 June, they held an opposing council and, as a countermove, deposed Cyril and Memnon. This led to a stalemate, which only the emperor could resolve. First he placed all three adversaries under house arrest. But recalling the earlier popular tumult directed against the patriarch and renewed pressure on the part of the monks, he let Nestorius fall and sent him back to his monastery. By means of bribery, Cyril and Memnon succeeded in regaining their offices. While Nestorius was, on a personal level, the loser in this dispute, with regard to dogma Cyril had to submit two years later and sign a formula of reconciliation that stood closer to Nestorius's ideas than to his own. The Church itself emerged as the true loser, as over the course of the next 20 years its unity shattered into three mutually antagonistic Churches. Looked at in the short term, the removal of Nestorius from office signified a victory for the patriarchates of Rome and Alexandria over those of Constantinople and Antioch.

Ephesus placed in the stocks of heresy not only Nestorius but also the Antiochene school of

thought. More than a dozen Antiochene bishops were deposed, and adherents of the school were persecuted on behalf of the state, triggering a wave of immigration into neighbouring Persia, which culminated in the closing of the School of the Persians in Edessa. It was this development, combined with the efforts of the Church of the East to distance itself, for political reasons, as much as possible from Byzantium, that motivated the Church of the East to appropriate Theodore of Mopsuestia as their key teacher.

Nestorius spent four years in his monastery, until, at the instigation of his one-time mentor John of Antioch, he was sent into exile in Egypt. At the same time, Emperor Theodosius ordered the burning of the collected writings of his former patriarch – a harbinger of the Inquisition. In order to expunge every memory of Nestorius, children who bore his name were rebaptized with new names.[83] In exile Nestorius remained a keen observer of developments in the Church and produced numerous writings, although he harboured no illusions about a possible rehabilitation. 'I have lost interest in human matters. I have left the world and live for Him who gave me life.'[84] Although his friends pressured him repeatedly to turn to the pope and clarify his theological views in writing, he refused, for he was aware of 'the prejudices against [his] person'.[85]

Since his writings were burned, Nestorius is known outside the Church of the East only through the accusations and slander of Cyril, and thus the belief that he was correctly condemned as a heretic prevailed. In Kotchannes, the Nestorian patriarchal see in Kurdistan,[86] a Syriac manuscript from c.1100 was preserved. When, in the 1880s, American missionaries heard the rumour that this manuscript was the translation of Nestorius's chief work, originally written in Greek, a Syrian priest succeeded in secretly making a copy of it in 1889. The discovery was a sensation because the manuscript was the *Bazaar of Heracleides*, the principal work of Nestorius. In it he refuted point by point all the accusations made against him. When he completed it in 451, a few weeks before his death, he sensed his imminent end and closed with the following tranquil words: 'The moment of my death now draws near, and every day I beg God to release me, whose eyes have seen God's grace. Rejoice, you desert, my friend, provider, and home, and you, exile, my mother, which will keep my body after my death until resurrection, God willing. Amen.'[87]

Did Nestorius indeed teach the heresy that bears his name? If we understand 'Nestorianism' as that heresy that sees in Christ two persons, which are connected to one another only in a loose moral bond (i.e. that teaches two Sons and denies the complete incarnation), then the *Bazaar of Heracleides* corrects this misconception. Nestorius was no Nestorian in the canonical sense; he never taught the heresy attributed to him. In his writings in his defence, he vehemently denied the accusation that he was an Adoptionist – that is, that he taught that God the Father adopted the purely human Jesus on account of his perfect morality. He emphasized again and again the complete ontological unity of Christ and the genuine incarnation of the Word in him, which did not happen only at his baptism but, rather, simultaneously with the Annunciation to Mary. He countered the charge that he implied two Sons with his concept of the union in the prosopon.[88]

To understand Nestorius's position, it is also enlightening to consider his agreement with the formula of Pope Leo I, which laid the foundation of the Chalcedonian creed in 451.[89] In the *Bazaar of Heracleides* he declared repeatedly that 'this creed [of the bishop of Rome] was orthodox and unobjectionable'.[90] According to Jacobite authors – i.e. theological opponents of Nestorius – the deposed patriarch died one day before the arrival of the message inviting him to participate in the

The Christian necropolis of El Bagawat in the Egyptian oasis of Kharga, where Patriarch Nestorius lived in exile from 435 until his death in 451.

Council of Chalcedon.[91] Even if Nestorius had attended this council and accepted its creed, it is unlikely that the council would have rehabilitated him, since he was hated by far too many bishops. Such a rehabilitation would have also called into doubt the Council of Ephesus.[92]

Although Cyril had pushed through his extreme formulations at the Council of Ephesus, the continuing opposition of the bishops of Antioch forced the emperor to seek a compromise. In 433 John of Antioch and Cyril of Alexandria signed the formula of union produced by Theodoret of Kyros (†c. 466), a moderate adherent of the School of Antioch. With regard to theology Cyril had to submit, as his formula of a 'natural union' of the two dimensions of Christ[93] was replaced by a two-nature formula. 'We confess that our Lord Jesus Christ … is wholly God and wholly man. [He is] one in substance with the Father in his divinity and one in substance with us in his humanity. It was a union of two natures.'[94] In retaliation, Cyril demanded and received confirmation of Nestorius's condemnation. It was especially tragic for Nestorius that he was sacrificed on the altar of the formula of union, since he could have agreed to its content. Several bishops of Antioch, who did not want to subscribe to the denunciation of their intellectual forefather, fled to Iran, where they joined the Church of the East.

IV The Loss of Christian Ecumene

The Council of Chalcedon

The 433 truce within the Church did not last long. The patriarchates of Antioch and Alexandria continued to fight for influence, with both leaders of the Alexandrian party displaying a marked recklessness. One was Cyril's successor Dioskoros (†457), patriarch of Alexandria from 444, and the other was the archimandrite (abbot) Eutyches (378–454) in Constantinople. Eutyches was a fanatical opponent of Nestorius and represented an extreme Monophysitism, in which Christ consisted of a single nature. He also denied that 'the body of our Lord and God was of the same substance as ours'.[1] At the Second Council of Ephesus, in 449, Dioskoros and Eutyches intimidated disagreeable participants or excluded them by violent means. So Dioskoros handed the just deposed bishop of Constantinople, Flavianus, over to the mob, who abused him so severely that he died of his injuries. They also prevented the papal legates from presenting the Christological position paper prepared by Pope Leo, which led Leo to condemn the council as the 'Robber Synod'. The acts of the synod also reveal the extent to which sentiment was aroused in opposition to Nestorius, who had been deposed 18 years earlier. When the letter of the Antiochene bishop Ibas (†457) was read, those present cried, 'Nestorius and Ibas should burn together! Nestorius and Ibas should burn in the middle of Antioch! The banishment was fruitless. Nestorius and Ibas should be burned at once! Burn Satan and his son right away.'[2] Bishops and abbots were not immune to primitive hatred.

The new emperor, Marcian, decided to establish order in the dreadfully estranged Church and summoned a new council, which opened in Chalcedon on 8 October 451 with about 500 participants. For political reasons, the Church of the East was not represented. The council abolished the decisions of the Robber Synod, acquitting the Antiochene bishops condemned there and condemning Dioskoros and Eutyches. It then formulated the Chalcedonian creed, which it based on the *Tome* of Pope Leo. 'Christ is acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons.'[3] Although the final clause was clearly directed against Nestorius, the Chalcedonian creed was close to Nestorius's. The only difference was that the Chalcedonian spoke of the union in the hypostasis – that is, of a single hypostasis – while Nestorius accepted two hypostases and located the union in the prosopon.[4] However, the council also confirmed

Cyril's letters and Nestorius's condemnation. Put in oversimplified terms, a paradox emerges: Chalcedon nearly confirmed the teachings of Nestorius but condemned his person, while it largely abjured the teachings of Cyril but lauded him as a saint. The Chalcedonian formula has provided until today the basis of the Christology of the Byzantine-Slavic Orthodox as well as the Roman Catholic Churches.[5]

Syrians, who love to express themselves in analogies, often use the following circumlocutions for these complex definitions. The Miaphysites compare the nature of Christ to the blending of honey and vinegar into the healing balm oxymel,[6] a metaphor the Nestorians strongly rejected on account of the combining of the two natures. Supporters of Chalcedon chose the image of the soul and the body, which make up a single human being.[7] This comparison was also unacceptable for the Nestorians, since, when the body suffers, the soul also suffers; but the divine nature of Christ was not affected by the suffering of the body of Jesus. The East Syrians, such as Patriarch Elias II (1111–1134), preferred the image of a ray of light striking a pearl: 'The light reveals itself in the pearl and the eye of the beholder does not distinguish between them. And, if the pearl cracks, the ray of light remains whole and does not remove itself from the fragments.'[8]

This last passage means that the divine nature did not leave the dead body of Jesus in the tomb. The present patriarch of the Church of the East, Mar Dinkha IV, explains this as follows: 'According to our Christology, God did not die on the cross, but rather the human body did. Jesus the man died of free will for the salvation of humanity. This aspect requires as a consequence that we respect the human aspects of Christ. The divine did not suffer on the cross, but stayed united with him, even in the tomb. When Jesus cried, "Father, why have you forsaken me?", that did not mean that the divine had left the dying man; the cry expressed Jesus's desperation. On the third day Jesus Christ rose from the dead as a spiritual body, no longer a human body, for this had in fact died on the cross. The Resurrection was the transformation of the human body into a spiritual body. In other words, the human hypostasis no longer chose an earthly body but rather a spiritual one.'[9]

In the Church of the East the resurrection of Christ, rather than the crucifixion, is emphasized. Mural in the Syrian Orthodox Church of St Mary in Angamali, Kerala, seventeenth century. According to tradition, the church was founded in the fifth or ninth century and was closely tied to the Church of the East. Bishop Abraham, consecrated by the Nestorian patriarch Shimun VIII (in office 1551–1558) for India, reached Angamali after an odyssey of about ten years. After his death in 1597, Archdeacon George of the Cross, whom he had ordained, led the Indian metropolitan see. A Syriac inscription in the Church of St Mary memorializes the archdeacon, who died in 1640.[17]

Although the Chalcedonian creed brought to an end the creative phase of the Christological discussion, the mystery of the nature of Christ remained. The Nestorian theologian Mar Odisho acknowledged this fact in 1298: 'If we say of God that he is invisible, not composite, immovable, and unchangeable, we describe not what He is but rather what He is not.'[10] The fact that the creed of Chalcedon was repeatedly reworked in the West had little to do with theological debates and much more to do with the political power situation in the Byzantine Empire.

Intra-Byzantine debates over belief and their effects on the Church of the East

The Council of Chalcedon intended to safeguard the Christian ecumene, but the consequences of its decisions brought about precisely the opposite effect, namely the disintegration of the ecumene into three independent Churches with their own hierarchies. For the Miaphysite party of Alexandria, the Chalcedonian creed was unacceptable because they saw in it – not entirely without justification – a victory for the Antiochene theology and thus for Nestorius. For the Miaphysites, who rejected the extreme monotheism of Eutyches, a *single* nature resulted in Christ from the union of the divine with the human nature in the Incarnation. They appealed to the Council of Nicea, which had declared that the Father and the Son were of the same substance.

The mood in the patriarchate of Alexandria was marked by nationalistic indignation against the domineering capital of Byzantium and increasing rejection of imperial authority. Since the emperor had supported the Chalcedonian position with his powers, popular anger was directed against this as well. Now supporters of the council were derided by the Miaphysites as Melkites – that is, as royalists.[11] The anti-Byzantine reflex also occurred in Palestine and Syria; here rejection of the council expressed the Syrian-Oriental opposition to the despised central authority. The fundamental rejection of Byzantine sovereignty was made all too obvious 200 years later, when Egypt and Syria welcomed the Arab conquerors as liberators.

A first tragic highpoint was reached in 457 in Alexandria, when a rampaging mob murdered the pro-Chalcedonian patriarch Proterios in his church,[12] and severe unrest broke out in Egypt and Syria. The emperor recognized the danger that the stability of the Eastern Roman Empire was under serious threat. Since Egypt and Syria were much more important for imperial unity than were the scattered Antiochenes, the pope or the powerless Western Roman emperor – this last was deposed by the barbarian Odoacer in 476 – the emperor decided to accommodate the outraged Miaphysites, even at the price of a schism with Rome. In this spirit, in 482 Emperor Zeno (ruled 474–491) issued a new Christological formula of union, the so-called *Henoticon*, which again condemned Nestorius and confirmed Cyril's anathemas instead of the *Tome* of Pope Leo. The reaction from Pope Felix III was not long in coming; in 484 he excommunicated Zeno and the patriarch of Constantinople, Acacius, who excommunicated him in turn. The schism persisted until 519.

The ones who suffered on account of the *Henoticon* were the remaining Antiochenes, who were now persecuted by the state and either sought refuge in the neighbouring Sassanian Empire or joined the Melkites. The closing of the School of the Persians in Edessa in 489 banished the Antiochene theology from the empire once and for all, and bolted the doorway to theological communication between East and West. The policy of conciliation towards the Miaphysites also resulted in many dioceses of Syria and Asia Minor being held by Miaphysite bishops. In the larger cities, two bishops – one Melkite and one Miaphysite – were in residence, so that two parallel patriarchates of Antioch and Alexandria were created.

But the political winds changed again with the accession to the throne of Emperor Justin (ruled 518–527), who had as his goal the re-establishment of the unity of the Eastern and Western Roman Empires. To this end, he required the support of the pope, so he revoked the *Henoticon* and recognized the Council of Chalcedon. He sacrificed the Miaphysites to the goal of a resurrected Roman Empire. At Easter 519 he was able to celebrate this new

ecumene with Rome and end the 35-year schism. The Miaphysites paid the price for the ecumene with the deposing of their patriarch of Antioch, Severus, as well as 55 other bishops. Justin's nephew and successor, Justinian (ruled 527–565), continued his uncle's policies and in 533 elevated to law a new Chalcedonian creed, which the synod of 536 correspondingly ratified. At the same time, persecution of the Miaphysites intensified in the years 521–526, 536–543 and 555–567,[13] provoking a massive wave of immigration to Sassanian Mesopotamia and plunging the Church of the East there into a serious crisis.[14]

The synodal decisions of 536 marked a deep break in the history of Christianity. Since the Miaphysites had been deprived of all their bishops, they had to build a new organization, independent of Byzantium. And so there emerged in Egypt the Coptic Church and in Syria the Syrian Orthodox Church, organized secretly by Jacob Baradaeus beginning in 542.[15] The renewed ecumene with Rome was bought at the price of the schism with the Miaphysite Churches.

And matters got still worse. In 544 Emperor Justinian undertook a dubious attempt to win back the Miaphysites by means of the edict of the so-called *Three Chapters*. The *Three Chapters* encompassed the condemnation of the person and doctrine of Theodore of Mopsuestia, the writings of the Antiochene bishop Theodoret and the letter of Ibas, the last Antiochene bishop of Edessa, to the Pesian Mari. Pope Vigilius agreed to the corresponding conciliar declaration of 553 only under massive pressure from Justinian. With the condemnation of Theodore, the most significant Church Father of the Church of the East, the entire Church of the East was *eo ipso* condemned as heretical. This condemnation was all the more tragic since the Nestorian patriarch at the time, Mar Aba the Great (540–552), was working towards reconciliation with

West facade of the Byzantine basilica of Baqirha, Syria, built in 546. Byzantium tried, through the construction of numerous great basilicas in the patriarchate of Antioch, to reinforce its hegemony, which was threatened by the Miaphysites.

Byzantium and Rome.[16] Justinian's council also accommodated the Miaphysites with regard to the definition of the hypostatic union in Christ, in that it gave the divine nature precedence over the human. In the so-called enhypostasis, the human nature, which is no longer understood as an independent hypostasis but merely as an enhypostasis that does not exist in itself, is incorporated into the divine nature.[17]

The reaction of the Church of the East against the concept of a composite hypostasis appeared clearly on the occasion of the 585 synod of Patriarch Ishoyahb I (in office 582–596): 'The heretics [of the council of 553] dared in their foolishness to attribute to the nature and qnoma of his divinity the qualities and sufferings of the humanity of Christ.'[18] The posthumous

Central octagonal court of the large, quadruple cruciform basilica of St Simeon in Syria. The Byzantine emperor Zeno (ruled 474–491) opposed both Dyophysites and Miaphysites and, by closing the theological university of Edessa, banished the Church of the East to the Sassanian Empire. He built the church, which in its architectonic concept anticipated the Hagia Sophia of Justinian, in order to appropriate for the imperial Church Simeon the Stylite, who was highly venerated by the local Miaphysite population. The ascetic, who died in 459, spent the last 30 years of his life atop a 16-metre-high column. The monastery quickly became the most important pilgrimage site in Syria and played a significant role in the Christianization of the Arab tribes; Simeon's column, however, was chiselled down by pilgrims to the stump that remains today.

denunciation of the Church Father Theodore of Mopsuestia, considered orthodox during his lifetime, is also problematic in principle. In polemical terms, one might ask: 'Were Luke and Mark not orthodox, since they were not familiar with the Trinity?' The lone result of the council of 553 was that a second schism occurred and the first persisted, since the Miaphysites were not impressed by the *Three Chapters*. And so the Christian ecumene split into three independentChurches: first, the state Church of Rome, Constantinople and Jerusalem, as well as that half of the Syrians of Antioch who subscribed to the creed of Chalcedon; second, the anti-Chalcedonian Churches of the Copts and the Syrian Orthod ox; and, third, the Church of the East, lying to the east of the Euphrates.

According to the majority of interpreters, the breakdown of the Christian ecumene can be explained by two factors. For one, with its elevation to state Church, the Church lost to some degree its independence. Now a certain creed could be accepted not on theological grounds but because it conformed to the ideas of the civil authority. As a consequence of this amalgamation of Church and state, it was inevitable that political opposition directed against the state would *eo ipso* also turn against the Church and support dissenting religious factions. For another, there arose the tendency to permit only one interpretation of a mystery, such as the nature of Christ, and to condemn representatives of other positions as heretics – the epitome of the spirit of monotheism. If

The three-naved basilica of Mushabbaq was built at the same time as the Monastery of St Simeon and likewise served as a pilgrimage site. As at other ancient churches seen by the author in 2002, here vandals have tried, by smashing cornerstones, to knock down entire walls.

there is only one God, whom one believes can be precisely defined, then there can be but one truth about him, or else one must speak of several gods or several truths regarding the same facts. History shows that the clergy of monotheistic religions incline towards allowing only a single, universal definition of 'their' god and his message.

That other approaches are also possible is shown by, for instance, the Mongol Great Khan Möngke (ruled 1251–1259). When, in 1254, the Franciscan Rubruk wanted him to convert to Catholicism, he replied, 'We Mongols believe that there is only one God, in whom we live and die, and we direct our whole hearts to him. However, just as God has given the hand several fingers, so did he give human beings several ways to attain salvation.'[19] The wisdom of this Mongol prince lay in the recognition that a diamond has many facets and that the human eye can perceive only one facet at a time; despite the various impressions of it, however, the diamond remains one and the same.

The Peshitta Bible, the common tie between the Syrian Churches

The erstwhile Syrian Christian community was now split into three mutually antagonistic Churches. But the common language, Aramaic, offered the foundation for a significant shared possession, the Bible known as the Peshitta.[20] After the issuing of Tatian's Diatessaron around 170 the search for a unifying and binding canon of New Testament writings continued in both East and West.[21] Bishop Irenaeus (142–c. 200) outlined the kernel of the contents of the Latin *Vulgate* Bible, confirmed in the West at the Council of Trent in 1546, which consisted of the four Gospels and Pauline epistles, and this was followed shortly, around the year 200, by the

East Syrian Gospel book based on the Peshitta, written in Estrangela script, from Khuzistan, Iran, ninth to thirteenth century. The pages shown are from the Gospel of John, chapter 3. The Gospel book contains about 225 leaves, measuring 16.5 x 23 cm, or 450 pages of text. It is a parchment manuscript, with the exception of the first and the last four sets of pages, a total of 40 leaves, which are made of paper and represent a later restoration. The colophon is missing. (National Library of Tabriz, Iran.)[18]

so-called *Canon Muratori*.[22] Then, in his Easter letter of 367, the Church Father Athanasius enumerated those 27 books that define the New Testament portion of the Vulgate. In 384 St Jerome (c. 342–420) produced the Latin translation of the Greek texts.[23] They included the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, 14 letters attributed to Paul, 7 so-called 'catholic' letters and the long-disputed Revelation of John.

It is debated which gospel writing was in circulation east of the Euphrates before the Diatessaron. Vööbus and Kawerau cite the Aramaic Gospel of the Hebrews, which displays certain similarities to the Gospel of Matthew,[24] while Henneke assigns it to the Jewish Christian circle of Egypt.[25] The Diatessaron was followed by the *Vetus Syra*, written in the Syriac language and Estrangela script, that includes the four Gospels separate from one another. Since its use is evident in the sermons of the Persian Church Father Aphrahat from 337–345, and it is mentioned in a letter from the bishop of Edessa Aitallaha (in office 324–346), it must have appeared around the first quarter of the fourth century. Despite the rapid spread of the Peshitta, the Vetus Syra remained in use in the Church of the East, especially among monks, for a few centuries.[26]

The Syrian Peshitta Bible was the counterpart of the Latin Vulgate. Its name means 'the simple'. It is one of the many revisions of the Vetus Syra and must have appeared before the Council of Ephesus in 431, since it would otherwise be incomprehensible that it served as the norm for both Miaphysites and Nestorians. Today a few fragmentary Peshitta manuscripts from the fifth century are extant as well as another thirty from the sixth century. The oldest Peshitta manuscript is from 459/460 for the Old Testament and 510 for the Gospels. The oldest extant Syriac manuscript, dated to 411, is non-biblical.[27] In comparison to the Vulgate, the New Testament of Peshitta is

missing the Second Letter of Peter, the Second and Third Letters of John, the Letter of Jude, and Revelation. Thus the New Testament of the Syrian churches numbers 22 books instead of the 27 books of the Vulgate. At the beginning of the sixth century, the Miaphysites undertook the attempt to conform the Peshitta to their requirements. Bishop Philoxenos of Mabbug (c. 440 – 523) ordered the creation of a more polemically formulated Bible, which was, however, never accepted by the Miaphysites and disappeared during the slackening of the Christological controversy in the seventh / eighth centuries. From another Bible from the Miaphysite bishop Heraclius of Mabbug appearing around 616 / 617, the Acts and Epistles were quickly abandoned, but the Gospels remained popular.[28] The Peshitta has remained to this day the bond linking the West and East Syrians together.

The church of the Miaphysite Monastery of St Daniel of Deir Breij in northern Syria, late sixth century. Although the Miaphysites were considered heretics by the Byzantine imperial Church, they were also able to head their own monasteries in Syria in the second half of the sixth century.

Cross on a door lintel of the St Daniel Church of Deir Breij, northern Syria.

V The Patriarchate of Seleucia-Ctesiphon

The political and religious situation under the early Sassanians

The Christian missionaries understood how to exploit the liberal climate under the hellenophile Parthians, not just spreading the Good News among the Jewish Diaspora and the local Aramaic populations but also carrying it to the other side of Persia into Central Asia. As already mentioned, between 196 and 222 Bardaisan reported about Christian communities in Transoxania.[1] At the start of the third century Christianity reached from the Euphrates to the foot of the Hindu Kush mountains.

This situation conducive to the spread of Christianity changed with the overthrow of the increasingly weak Parthians by the Sassanians around 224/226. The founder of the dynasty was Ardashir (ruled 224/226–240/241), grandson of a Zoroastrian high priest of Persepolis. The national rebellion of the Sassanians was also a religious revolt, and the objectives of the two complemented each other perfectly. On the political plane it was necessary to ward off the Roman threat on the western border and to re-establish the former military strength and splendour of the Iranian empire of the Achaemenians, and in the realm of religion the ancient Persian religion of Zoroastrianism had to be revived and the invasion of foreign religions such as Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism checked. The conditions created the foundation for the elevation of Zoroastrianism to the state religion of the Sassanians.

In 227, after the conquest of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Ardashir turned eastward and conquered, one after the other, Seistan (south-eastern Iran), Merv and Bactria (western Afghanistan), and defeated the empire of the Kushan, which extended from the Indus basin to Turkistan in the north. The task of putting Rome in its place fell to his son, Shapur I (ruled 240/241–272), who humiliated the Roman Empire three times in quick succession. First he defeated Emperor Gordinaus III (ruled 228–244), after which he captured emperors Philip the Arab (ruled 244–249) and Valerian (ruled 253–260) in battle. Shapur's empire stretched from Edessa on the Euphrates in the west to the Indus delta in the east and from Oman in the south to Sogdia (Uzbekistan) in the north. In the years 244, 256 and 259/260 Shapur entered Syria, Cilicia and Cappadocia, deporting hundreds of thousands of prisoners to Iran and settling them in new cities. The most famous was Gondeshapur, site of a Nestorian School, which was converted in 529 into a laicized national university of the Sassanians. Paradoxically, it was Shapur I, who used his authority to promote the renaissance of Zoroastrianism, who, by means of his deportations, planted Christianity in the Iranian heartland of Fars, Elam and Khuzistan.

But the Romans did not concede defeat, and Emperor Carus (ruled 282–283) rapidly advanced as far as Ctesiphon, where he was

struck by lightning and died. Ten years later the Sassanian Narses (ruled 293–302) found himself forced to make peace and cede Armenia and north-western Mesopotamia to Rome. Prior to this time the Christians of Iran had been unaffected by the Roman-Sassanian war, since Rome was still pagan. Two factors changed the situation of Sassanian Christians for the worse. First, Shapur and his successors gradually elevated Zoroastrianism to the state religion, and second, in 312/13 the Roman emperor Constantine professed Christianity, making it into a state-supported religion. From the Sassanian perspective, the religion of the Christian minority was from then on the statereligion of the arch-enemy Rome – a disastrous development for the Christians of Iran, as now they were encumbered by the suspicion that they were a 'fifth column' of Rome. The political history of the Sassanians from the fourth century to the invasion of the Arabs, which will be surveyed in the section after next, demonstrates that every Roman-Sassanian war brought with it the persecution of Christians, which always eased after peace treaties were concluded.

Stone relief in Naqsh-e Rostam, Iran, mid-third century CE. Kneeling before the victorious Shah Shapur I is the vanquished Roman emperor Philip the Arab; behind him stands Emperor Valerian, taken prisoner in 260. Gordianus III, likewise defeated in 244, is missing.

Zoroastrianism in the Sassanian Empire

The pre-Zoroastrian Iranians were, like the related Aryans of India, polytheists, who worshipped some of the same gods. At that time the three chief gods were Ahura Mazda, the 'wise god'; the god of the sun and truth, Mithra; and the goddess of love and war, Anahita. The eastern Iranian prophet Zarathustra, called Zoroaster in Greek, was active in the early first millennium BCE.[2] He was an ethical prophet with a basically monotheistic vision, which was embedded in a relative dualism. This dualism was understood not as an absolute and eternal opposition of two antagonistic powers but rather as the 12,000-year-long struggle between the god of goodness and light, Ahura Mazda, and the god of evil and darkness, Ahriman, whom one can consider a kind of precursor to the Christian devil. Within the framework of the Zoroastrian cosmology, the omnipotence of Ahura Mazda is limited only temporally, and he needs the help of humanity to win it back. In order to defeat Ahriman, Ahura Mazda first creates the universe as the battlefield for a titanic war of the gods.

As a consequence of the free will given to human beings, they must, within the context of the cosmic battle, take a position and decide in favour of good or evil. As the microcosmic image of the macrocosmic universe, the human being is both the stage for and a participant in the struggle of Ahura Mazda against Ahriman. The way of the good demands the proper attitude, truthful speech, and good and just actions. Zarathustra especially detested lying. For this reason, Zarathustra ordered the worship of the eternal fire, as a symbol of pure truth. In contrast to Augustinian Christianity and Manichaeism, the opposition between good and

evil is not identical with that between spirit and matter. The Zoroastrian anthropology, like its cosmology, is fundamentally optimistic, teaching the perfection of creation and of the human being, who is sinless in himself, as well as the triumph of good over evil at the conclusion of the eschatological process. Since matter can be just as perfect as spirit – indeed, it can even be interpreted as its salvific fulfilment – the human being supports the good with his spirit, his soul *and* his body, and not, as in Syrian monasticism and Manichaeism, *against* his body. Because the struggle for the good also requires the strengthening of creation, positive in its nature, which is continually attacked and damaged by Ahriman, the human being is obligated not only to have the correct attitude, correct speech and correct acts, but also to sustain life though agriculture, the breeding of livestock and, above all, the begetting of offspring.

This moral obligation of labour and marriage to produce children is diametrically opposed to the monastic ideal of an abstinence from bodily labour in favour of prayer, vegetarianism, strict fasting and celibacy. As we will see below, one of the most frequent accusations made by the Zoroastrian clergy against Christian monks and nuns concerned their vows of celibacy. In times of persecution, Zoroastrian priests presented captured Christian clerics, monks and nuns with the choice between worshipping the sacred fire and the sun and marrying or suffering an agonizing death.[3]

In addition to disrespect for the sacred fire and celibacy, the third accusation made against Christians concerned their burials. Because Zarathustra not only affirmed the enjoyment of earthly pleasures but also prohibited the besmirching of the earth, the four foundational elements of fire, water, earth and air were considered sacred, so they could under no circumstances be defiled by the burial of impure corpses. Only the offering of corpses to birds of prey in designated places was permitted. Accordingly, the official complaint against the Christians from the year 376 reads: 'The Christians destroy our teachings and teach not to worship the sun and not to honour the fires, to pollute the water through nasty ablutions, not to marry, not to produce sons and daughters, not to enter into war [against Christian Byzantium] alongside the king, not to slaughter and eat animals without pangs of conscience, [and] to bury the dead in the earth.'[4] Compromise was hardly possible between religions based on fundamentally opposed anthropologies.

The fundamental importance of marriage to Zoroastrians can also be seen in the conversation between King Vahram III (ruled 293) and Bishop Papa of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Since both theManichaean clergy and the East Syrian bishops lived celibately, they were to the king equivalent heretics, hostile to the state and deserving of death. 'Since the king saw that the bishops abstained from marriage, in accordance with the School of the Manichees, he commanded the execution of the Manichees and the Christians.'

Farawahar of the king in the hall of a hundred pillars, Persepolis, Iran. The symbol represents the eternal spirit of humanity. The three parts of the wings symbolize the moral mandates of pure thoughts, pure words and pure deeds; the ring in the middle the immortality of the spirit; and the two nooses falling from it, as well as the alignment of the head, the turning away from evil and the turning towards good. The raised right hand gestures towards the invisible Ahura Mazda, and the left holds the ring of fidelity.

The two Zoroastrian towers of silence in Yazd, Iran. In such funeral towers the Zoroastrians left their dead to be eaten by vultures, after which they placed the bare bones in ossuaries or stone niches. This traditional type of funeral has been outlawed in Iran since 1970 for hygienic reasons.

In this crisis, Bishop Papa approached the king and explained, 'The Manichees believe in two gods, that the earth has life, that souls can move from one body to another, and that marriage is abominable. The Christians acknowledge one God, condone marriage, and this is forbidden only to its leaders, in order that they might persist in prayer.'[5] Papa's clarification helped lead to a short-lived and limited cessation of persecution. To refute this accusation, the synod of 486 determined to require marriage of all clergy.

According to Zoroastrian ideas, after death the dead must cross the Bridge of Judgement. In the case that the good outweighed the bad in the life in question, the deceased found on the other side of the bridge a temporary paradise; if the bad had predominated, the deceased fell from the bridge into hell, likewise for a limited time. In the chaos of the cosmic final battle the final saviour appears to resurrect all the dead and determine a second, final judgement. Once again, the good are assigned to paradise and the evil to hell.[6] After the final victory of good over evil and after serving their sentences, the former inhabitants of hell, now purified, also reach the paradise of God. Ahura Mazda has now regained his omnipotence, and humanity enjoys eternal life. The gates of hell remain closed for ever.

There is little doubt that Zoroastrian thought found its way into both Jewish and Christian ideas. These ideas include the juxtaposition of the opposites of good/evil and light/darkness,[7] an ultimate saviour, the resurrection of the dead

and their sentencing on Judgement Day, as well as the belief, widespread among Nestorians, that the period in hell for purposes of atonement is for a limited time.[8]

Zoroastrianism was able to develop to a certain degree under the Achaemenians (559–330 BCE) but had to tolerate the cults of Mithra and Anahita. Under the Parthians it was at first more and more forgotten, but, as a result of the anti-Hellenistic reaction, the gathering of Zoroastrian texts into the sacred book of the Avesta began under King Vologases (ruled 51–78 CE).[9] The first two Sassanian kings, Ardashir and Shapur I, systematically continued the written compilation of Zoroastrian doctrine. While in the time of the Parthians the Arsacid, north-western Pahlavi script was used for this, Sassanian scholars developed their own script from the Sassanian, south-western Pahlavi for the writing of the Avesta, as evidenced by a consequent use of vowels in the text. While Arsacidian script, derived from Aramaic, numbers 20 letters, and the Sassanian 19, the Avesta alphabet, called Pazand, consists of 54 symbols, of which 14 are vowels. All three scripts of Pahlavi run right to left.[10] The Sassanian Avesta represented a blend of Zarathustra's teachings and ideas from popular religion, as ancient Persian gods, such as Mithra, Anahita and the victory god Verethraghna, who had been ignored by Zarathustra, reappear in the Avesta.

It seems that the dualism between good and evil is radicalized in the Sassanian Avesta. 'There are two original spirits, twins, who are known for being in opposition to one another. In thought, word and deed they are two, the good and the bad.'[11] The following verse from the Yasna, a part of the Avesta, maintains, 'When these two spirits, Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, encountered each other, one created existence and the other non-existence. This situation will last for eternity.'[12] In this interpretation of dualism, Ahura Mazda sees himself as confronted 'for eternity' by an equal god of nothingness, an anti-god. In order to overcome this strict dualism and re-establish the monotheistic vision of Zarathustra, the heresy of Zurvanism arose. In this teaching, time, Zurvan, becomes the father of the estranged twin spirits. Although Zurvanism further diminished the status of Ahura Mazda and the absolute nature of time implied the predestination of all events, abolishing Zarathustrian free will, it appears to have been popular with the Sassanian kings. However, Zurvanism remained merely an intellectual trend within official Zoroastrianism, and it commanded neither its own clergy nor an exclusive cult. Perhaps the monotheistic character of Zurvanism accounts for the occasional affinity of individual kings for Christianity.[13] However, the hopes of the Christians, that a Sassanian king would convert to Christianity, were never fulfilled, as political pressure and, above all, the influence of the Zoroastrian clergy was too powerful.

This clergy actually formed a caste, since their functions were hereditary. It consisted at its base of the *Herpad*, the so-called magicians, who tended the sacred fire in the local temples. Above them served the hierarchically structured *Magupat*, also called *Mobed*, the actual priests. At the peak of the hierarchical pyramid stood the *Magupatan Magupat* (*Mobedan Mobed*). This last functioned not only as the authority over all the magicians and priests but also had wide-ranging juridical competence and played a decisive role in determining a successor to the royal throne.

The architect of the Zoroastrian clergy was the Zoroastrian high priest Kartir, who elevated Zoroastrianism to the Sassanian state religion and fought against all 'foreign' religions. Four great stone inscriptions in the province of Fars provide information about the life and work of Kartir.[14] The mere fact that Kartir was able to put up his own self-glorifying inscriptions in

such sacred places as Naqsh-e Rajab and Naqsh-e Rostam – the Sassanian valley of the kings, where four of the most important Achaemenids found their final resting place – indicates that he occupied a position in the nation equal to the king's. In Sassanian Iran, state and Church formed an inseparable pair.[15]

The career of the Herpad Kartir as Magupatan Magupat and 'judge of all the empire' was unusual, with regard to both its duration and its power. Over a period of more than half a century, from c. 240 to 293, Kartir served six kings. First he served as priest under Ardashir (†240/241), after which he worked under Shapur I for the spread of Zoroastrian doctrine and its recording in writing. His real rise to the inner circle of power took place with his being named highest Magupat of Ahura Mazda by Hormizd I (ruled 272–273). In this capacity he organized the hierarchy of the Zoroastrian clergy, oversaw the orthodoxy of doctrine and announced the foundations of the new state religion in over 700 stone inscriptions.[16]

Vahram I (ruled 273–276) confirmed him in this leading role, allowing him to destroy his archrival Mani (216–272 or 276), who had enjoyed the favour of Shapur I. Vahram had recognized that the pessimistic asceticism of Mani, who condemned everything earthly and material as evil, could threaten the social order and the state. So Kartir ordered the systematic persecution of the Manichees, which he extended to the Christians around 287 for the reasons mentioned above.[17] Kartir reached the zenith of his power under Vahram II (ruled 276–293), who elevated him to the nobility and granted him the highest jurisdiction in the empire. As leader of all the clergy, guardian of orthodoxy and 'judge of all judges', he anticipated the later office of Mobedan Mobed and rose to become a kind of omnipotent Grand Inquisitor. During the time of Vahram II Kartir had his four inscriptions chiselled, and he continued to serve under

Varham III (ruled 293) and at the beginning of the reign of Narses (ruled 293–302), when his name appeared for the last time in the inscription proclaiming the new king's accession to the throne.[18] Since no inscription reports his death, it may be assumed that he rapidly lost influence under Narses.

The Zoroastrianism shaped into the state religion by Kartir was neither tolerant nor pacifist. Since its prophet had demanded from all people the promotion of the good and the fight against evil, this obligation for Church and state was equated with promotion of the Zoroastrian religion and its morality and the destruction of all other, 'false' religions. As a consequence of the close connection between Church and state, rejection of Zoroastrianism in favour of another

The Zoroastrian high priest Kartir (in office c. 240–293CE) had engraved on this Achaemenian tower-like shrine in Naqsh-e Rostam, Iran, his own inscription, in which he boasted of his achievements. He counted among these the promotion of Zoroastrianism and the persecution of all other religions found in Iran. To the left of the shrine, called the Kaaba-ye Zardosht, can be seen the grave of Darius II (ruled 423–404BCE), and to the right that of Darius I (ruled 522–486BCE).

Half-length portrait of the high priest Kartir in Naqsh-e Rajab, Iran, from the time of Vahram II (ruled 276–293CE). In the Pahlavi inscription Kartir promises paradise to the good and hell to the evil. The two crooked fingers are a sign of respect.

religion meant treason, which brought the death penalty. But, since there were only a few native Zoroastrians in Mesopotamia and south-western Iran, Christianity could spread there even under the Sassanians, while in the Zoroastrian heartland of the province of Fars it could attract only a minority. It should be noted that the pattern of varying attitudes of the state-supported religion and the government it legitimated towards Christianity, which swung between poles of benevolent tolerance and brutal repression, has remained the same in Mesopotamia and Iran to this day. The study of the history of Christianity under the Sassanians helps us understand the situation of the Christians there in modern times.

In the great inscription on the Zoroastrian tower of Naqsh-e Rostam Kartir boasted of his life's work by listing his various tasks and titles: 'In province after province, place after place, worship of Ormazd [Ahura Mazda] and the gods predominates. The Mazdan religion [Zoroastrianism] and the magicians enjoy the greatest respect in the empire, the teachings of Ahriman and the demons have been expelled and destroyed: the Jews, the shamans [Buddhists], the [Indian] Brahmans, the Nazarenes [Aramaic- and Middle-Persian-speaking East Syrians], the Christians [kristiyân, the Greek-speaking Christian refugees from the Roman Empire and Christian prisoners of war], the Maktaks [the Baptist sects of the Mandeans] and the Zandik [Manichees] have all been destroyed in the empire. Their idols were smashed and the homes of the demons [the foreign temples] destroyed.'[19]

In the final section of the inscription Kartir enumerated additional acts in promotion of religion: 'With the help of the gods, the king and my labour, countless fire temples were founded in the empire, many marriages between blood relatives took place and many unbelievers came to believe.'[20] The marriage of blood relatives desired by Zoroastrianism – kings often wedded their sisters and daughters – was another unavoid-able bone of contention between Christians and Zoroastrians. And so, for instance, the ban forbidding Christians from entering into Persian marriages between blood relatives, issued by Catholicos Mar Aba, led to the persecutions of 544.[21]

In the last 19 lines Kartir summarized the heart of Zoroastrian anthropology, which is formulated in greater detail in the nearby inscription of Naqsh-e Rajab: 'He who sees and reads this inscription should be generous and faithful to the gods, the kings and his own soul, as I was. He who does good will attain paradise, he who does evil will be thrown into hell. He who does good and behaves properly, to him will be granted glory and prosperity for his physical body, and his corporeal soul preserves upright-ness, as was granted to me, Kartir.'[22] In contrast to the teachings of Mani, in which the human body represents the work of the evil principle and only the particles of light in the soul can be redeemed, the doctrine of Kartir emphasized that the body of the human being, along with his spirit and soul, were all three created by the good god Ahura Mazda and thus have a divine nature. For this reason, the *whole* person – body, spirit and soul – reaches paradise. Since the Manichees condemned the begetting of children as a further damaging and defiling of the divine light, and Christian monks, nuns and the ascetic 'brothers and sisters of the covenant'[23] lived celibately, they were declared enemies of the good creator god Ahura Mazda and persecuted accordingly. The persecution of Christians did not spare the royal family, as is shown by the example of the Christian Candida, of Roman origin, who was one of the wives of Vahram II. She refused to accord to the wishes of the king and convert to Zoroastrianism and was for this reason cruelly tortured and then executed.[24] The first persecution of Christians, which subsided under Narses, was nonetheless merely a harmless prelude when compared to those of the following two centuries.

A century-long martyrdom from 340 to 457 and the first creation of an ecclesiastical hierarchy

'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.'[25]

At the beginning of the fourth century two events decisive for the Church of the East occurred. One was the development of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, and the other the elevation of Christianity to state church in the Roman Empire. As a consequence of the latter the systematic persecution of Christians began inthe Sassanian Empire at the same time that such persecutions ceased in Rome. In that moment in which the emperor of Rome, who had to that point been hostile to Christians, accepted Christianity, the Sassanian Empire, which had before been more or less neutral, became suspicious of or hostile towards its Christian population.

As with the question of the first missionary activity in Mesopotamia, with regard to the creation of an ecclesiastical hierarchy we move in a fluid, grey area between legend and historical fact. It is certain that in the third century the East Syrian congregations were familiar with the five-part hierarchical structure of bishop, archdeacon, chorepiscopus, presbyter and

deacon. The *bishop* stands at the apex of the offices within a given province of the Church, which bears the name of its capital city; he celebrates the ordination of new clerics and is responsible for obedience to orthodox doctrine. Unlike in Byzantium and Rome, the *archdeacon* holds the next highest clerical rank below bishop, and he has charge over the administration of the diocese, guides and controls the priests and deacons under his authority with full powers of instruction and punishment, and oversees the maintenance of Church doctrine. The archdeacon can be characterized as the bishop's representative, since he can take on the bishop's functions on an interim basis in the case of an episcopal vacancy. Below the archdeacon is the *chorepiscopus*, whose task is the visiting of churches and monasteries. Later the *periodeutai* (visitors), ranked below the chorepiscopi, took over this duty. The *presbyter* leads the congregations in worship and is supported in his work by the *deacons* and *subdeacons*, who are also active in the area of instruction.[26] Only the ecclesiastical office of deacon was open to women, who participated in the baptism of adults and the instruction of women. In the case of a deaconess who was also an abbess, she could also distribute holy communion as the representative of the bishop or the assigned priest.[27]

Until the start of the fourth century the East Syrian dioceses were largely autonomous. The centralization of the ecclesiastical hierarchy beginning in 204, asserted by Fiey, as well as the purported consecration of the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon by the bishop of Antioch[28] belong in the realm of later legend. The *Chronicle of Arbela* specifically reports that the small Christian community of the capital had no priest until the visit of Bishop Shalupa of Arbil (c. 258 – 273), who looked after it. 'Shalupa went to Ctesiphon, in order to visit the recently established small community of faith. There he laid hands upon a man and ordained him as priest.'[29] Presumably this priest was Papa bar-Aggai (†c. 327), whom Shalupa's successor Ahadabui (c. 273 – 291), at the request of local Christians, consecrated as bishop between 285 and 291.[30]

Around 315 Papa undertook the first attempt to place all the bishops of the Sassanian Empire under the authority of the bishop of the capital and to end the duplication of offices in the ecclesiastical provinces. As a consequence of the settlement of Christians deported from Syria, there resided in several provinces, such as, e.g., Beit Lapat (Gondeshapur), two bishops – an East Syrian-Aramaic and a West Syrian-Greek. Papa's vision was the creation of a tightly organized Iranian national Church under the primacy of the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. But Papa's plan and claim to leadership met with bitter opposition from his fellow bishops, who deposed him at a stormy synod – at which he suffered a stroke – and appointed in his place his archdeacon Shimun bar Sabba'e, whose parents maintained an excellent relationship with the king. The deposed bishop then appealed to the bishop of Edessa – not the bishop of Antioch – and other Western bishops, who supported him in his plan. The nascent Church of the East found itself in a crucial test, but a compromise saved the Church from the threat of schism. Seleucia-Ctesiphon's claim to authority was recognized out of political considerations, Papa was returned to his office according to the proper form, and the demoted Shimun was assured that he would be Papa's successor.[31] The recognition of the primacy of Seleucia-Ctesiphon can be considered the moment of birth for the Church of the East. A century later, the 424 Synod of Dadisho rehabilitated Papa and condemned the rebellious bishops.[32]

Although the Church had overcome its first internal crisis, it was soon confronted with an external danger that threatened its very existence: forty years of ongoing persecution

Stone relief of Shapur II (ruled 309–379), who is leaning on his sword. Bishapur, Iran. The shah tried in vain by means of severe persecutions to impede the spread of Christianity.

under Shapur II (ruled 309–379). The first cause of this is offered by the rash letter sent around 315 by Emperor Constantine, recently converted to Christianity, to the young shah: 'I am pleased to hear that the most beautiful provinces of Persia are adorned with Christians. Since you are so powerful and pious, I entrust them to your care and place them under your protection.'[33] By addressing Shapur in a rather patronizing tone, Constantine, as patron of all Christians, effected the opposite of his intention. Instead of aiding the Christians, he kindled in the shah a not unjustified suspicion that the Christians in his empire could, in the case of war with Rome, make up a dangerous fifth column. Constantine's support of the Christians of Armenia reinforced this impression.

The change of heart of the once tolerant shah became clear around 339/340, after his military offensive to recapture the north-western provinces around Nisibis, which had been ceded to Rome in 297, failed miserably, as did his vain attempt to besiege Nisibis. The refusal of the Christians to take an active part in the war increased Shapur's anger. In order to finance the war effort, he determined to impose a special tax on the Christians and to burden the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon with its collection. He wrote in his edict to the prefects of the prosperous province of Beit Aramaye (the fertile region around and to the south of Ctesiphon), 'Seize Shimun, leader of the Nazarenes, and do not set him free until he seals a document that he takes it upon himself to levy and pay doubled

head money and twice the taxes from the whole population of Nazarenes, who are staying in our land of the gods and live in our empire. For we, the gods, are in a state of war; they are in a state of joy and pleasure. They live in our land but are of like mind with the emperor, our enemy.'[34]

But Bishop Shimun I refused: 'We will not agree to collect taxes, for our power is not worldly, so that we may murder our brothers.'[35] This argument of Shimun was invalid, since the East Syrian Christians of Mesopotamia, like the Jews there, were organized into a semi-autonomous community – called 'millets' in the Ottoman period – whose ecclesiastical head had a political role, as well, and functioned as a link between his faithful and the civil administration. The Christians formed a kind of state within a state under the leadership of their religious head. Even when the king threatened Shimun with death, he remained steadfast, saying, 'For it is better for me to be stripped of the skin of my body than to take the clothing of the poor.'[36] The furious shah then ordered all churches and monasteries to be torn down and one hundred bishops, priests and deacons to be arrested.

However, Shapur renounced the double taxation and now summoned Bishop Shimun to worship the sun and the fire. According to the acts of Persian martyrs, a revealing dispute started between the shah and the bishops which gave the pattern for futher inquisitorial interrogations. For the Zoroastrian Mobeds usually first tried by argumentation to induce the arrested Christians to betray their religion.

Shimun: 'Heaven forbid that I worship sun and moon, whose course is transitory, or fire, which daily dies and goes out.'

Shapur II: 'If you will not worship fire because it is mortal, you may also not worship your god. For he died, as well, when the Jews crucified him. The mortality of fire means as much as the mortality of your god.' Regarding this claim of fire worship, a Zoroastrian Mobed, on the occasion of a disputation in 612, provided a more sophisticated answer than had the shah. He said, 'We do not consider the fire God, but rather we worship God by means of the fire, just as you worship your God by means of the cross.'[37]

Shimun: 'Heaven forbid, sire, that God would suffer and die. He [Christ] certainly did die, came back to life and arose, but not God. And this sun, which you now command me to worship, went dark when he was crucified.'

Shapur II: 'If you will not worship fire because it is mortal, then worship the immortal sun.'

Shimun: 'How should I pray to something that, though immortal, has neither knowledge nor reason? I will not worship you, O king, although you are superior to the sun, since you possess intelligence and reason. The sun, however, is unintelligent, and we do not know if it prefers you, who worship it, to me, who curse it.'

The king's threat that he would have thousands of Christians executed if he continued to refuse to worship sun and fire even just once did not persuade him. He ordered that the one hundred imprisoned clerics be beheaded before Shimun's eyes and that Shimun be executed last, which took place on 17 April or 14 September 341. On their way to the execution, the bishop encouraged his fellow sufferers in light of Shapur's final demand to worship sun and fire with these words: 'Why should we worship something that does not see our worshipping? And why pray to one who does not hear our prayers? And why praise something that knows nothing of its own light? Far be it from Christians to worship creatures as they should the Creator and confuse the Creator with his creation.'[38]

After this martyrdom there began an unmitigated hounding of the Christians, which was fomented, according to various sources, not only by the Zoroastrian priests but also by the Jews, as the latter actively participated in the

denunciation of Christians. The Jews were said to have convinced the ailing queen, who had recently converted to Judaism, that Shimun's two ascetic sisters had cast a spell on her to avenge their brother's death. They were then arrested and each sawed in half.[39] The state-mandated persecution rapidly deteriorated into wild, uncontrolled massacres, to which Zoroastrians also mistakenly fell victim. For example, in what is today Kirkuk, criminals had to help the overworked executioners. 'Many murderers were led from the prisons of Karkâ to kill [the Christians]. In the end, there were not enough murderers or swords for murdering.'[40] Not just the executioners but also the martyrs worked themselves into a frenzy of death, as many Christians condemned themselves and proceeded willingly to the places of execution to be awarded the crown of martyrdom. 'Many Christians, who came from various places, joined the confessors and said, "We belong to these Christians", and so were killed. The disorder increased, and one no longer knew whom one was killing.'[41]

In light of these uncontrolled pogroms and the flight of Christian farmers and merchants into the mountains, Shapur feared for the inner stability and prosperity of the empire. For this reason, he ordered that the persecutions be limited to the clergy and Christians who had converted from Zoroastrianism, which led to the destruction of the leading clergy and the organization put in place by Papa. Both Shimun's secretly elected successors were condemned after only a few months in office and executed along with hundreds of clerics –

The oval-shaped building, made up of 43 rooms, in the north-eastern corner of Gyaur Kala in Merv, Turkmenistan, has been interpreted as a Christian monastery by the Russian archaeologist G.A. Dreswanskaya. She found a cross in the plaster on one wall, and another on a tile, both of which she dates to the fifth/sixth centuries. In the background of the picture may be seen the older citadel of Erk Kala, which was mentioned in writing for the first time in the sixth century BCE by the Achaemenians. In the 1960s Dreswanskaya discovered to the north-east of the presumed monastery a necropolis, where she found ossuaries marked with crosses and even Jewish inscriptions, analogous to those from Mizdachkhan. However, Burchard Brentjes believed that the presumed monastery with oval floorplan belonged to the Melkites.[19]

Bishop Shahdost in 341 and Bishop Barbashmin around 345/346.[42] Since appointment as bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon was tantamount to a death sentence, this see remained vacant for more than half a century until the election of Isaac I (in office 399–410).[43]

The Sassanian persecutions were notable for both the nearly unlimited willingness of the Christians to make sacrifices and the extraordinarily cruel, indeed sadistic, performance of the executions. The confessors of faith were not just beheaded, stoned or crucified, they were murdered in clever ways that caused the greatest amount of pain. For instance, the executioner slit the victim's throat in such a way that he could tear out his tongue through the gaping wound. Others ripped off the skin of the face down to the neck or subjected them to the torture of the 'iron combs': '[The victim] was thrown to the ground with limbs outstretched, nails were driven into his hands and feet, and his body was combed over with iron combs until the flesh was torn from his bones.'[44] In other instances, victims were bound hand and foot and tossed into a pit filled with countless hungry rats and other vermin, where they were eaten alive by these creatures. In special cases, martyrs suffered the 'ninefold death', in which the executioner, over the course of six successive days, slowly cut off the limbs: first the fingers, then the toes, wrist, ankles, forearms and lower legs, upper arms and thighs, ears, nose, and finally the head. In order to forestall a premature death from blood loss, the fresh wounds were cauterized.[45] In the countryside, the Mobeds often forced the faithful laity to stone their own priests and deacons, which led many farm families to flee their villages for the mountains of Kurdistan.[46] Finally, mass executions were carried out by cramming Christians together into a tight space and using as many as three hundred elephants to trample them to death.[47]

Even though there were many cases of apostasy, the great number of confessing Christians, who for the sake of their faith joyfully accepted martyrdom, is astonishing. The confessors drew the necessary inner strength from the ideal of taking up the cross of Christ. As the first martyr, Christ had willingly accepted death, and now the martyrs, as *alter Christus* (second Christ) followed him. Their death was, so to speak, a re-enactment of the passion of Christ. This image makes clear that during the Sassanian persecution a genuine desire for martyrdom emerged.[48]

In the political-military realm, Shapur II again took up the war against the Eastern Roman Empire, after he had defeated the White Huns, who had advanced into eastern Iran, in a five-year campaign. First he conquered the city of Amida, today's Diyarbakir, after which he destroyed the attacking Emperor Julian (ruled 361–363) at Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Shapur forced his successor Jovian (ruled 363–364) to accept a humiliating peace agreement, requiring him to return to Iran the provinces conquered in 297, including Nisibis. Since Shapur granted the Christians of Nisibis safe conduct, most of them, including the biblical exegete and poet Ephrem the Great, fled to Edessa. At the same time, Shapur annexed the eastern regions of Armenia and Georgia, which had to that point been Byzantine protectorates. In the following centuries, this territorial expansion of Iran to the north-east offered the Church of the East the opportunity to engage in missionary activity in Armenia and Georgia. In Armenia it was Gregory the Illuminator who, around 314, converted King Tiridates III, whereupon the king declared Christianity the state religion; the analogous development occurred in Georgia around 337. While Georgia recognized the Council of Chalcedon around 600/608, the Armenian Church rejected it around 506 and in 555 explicitly confessed its adherence to the

Ruins of a church north-west of the city of Merv, Turkmenistan, which was a diocese of the Church of the East from the end of the fourth century. The church, presently called Khoruba Koshuk, was in use, probably with disruptions, till the eleventh century. Merv was an archdiocese from 544 until around the middle of the fourteenth century. In 1951 the Russian archaeologist G.A. Pugachenkova investigated the well-preserved structure and identified it as an early church from the period of the Sassanians.[20] The rectangular room measures 41 x 11.4 metres and is divided into four larger and two smaller chambers. The framework of the vault, which was at that time still partially extant, was in the form of a slightly pointed arch. The series of rooms culminated in a three-part apse, which was oriented with deviation of almost 5° to the east. Unfortunately, not only have the arches that were still standing in 1966 been destroyed but in comparison to 1966 not even 20 per cent of the structure then extant remains. The surrounding region is used for agriculture, and rain has ruined some of the stonework. Discoveries of Sassanian pottery and coins from the time of Kavad I (ruled 488–531) and Hormizd IV (ruled 579–590) substantiate Pugachenkova's dating. Much later, during the Seljuk seizure of power in the eleventh century, the church was converted into secular living quarters, as the presence of Seljuk pottery attests.[21]

Miaphysite creed.[49] Beginning no later than 424, as a result of its successful missionary work, the Church of the East had a diocese in Armenia, which Timothy I (ruled 780–823) elevated to a metropolitan see.[50] Starting in 363, eastern Georgia was for a century another target of East Syrian missionaries.[51]

Although the persecutions of Christians, which were concentrated in Mesopotamia, subsided somewhat with the establishment of peace with Byzantium, they came to an end only with the death of Ardashir II (379–383), Shapur II's successor, in 383. Nevertheless, local pogroms continued to flare up, fuelled by fanatical Mobeds or greedy officials who wanted to appropriate the confiscated possessions of the martyrs. It is unknown how many victims they claimed. Some sources speak of 16,000 martyrs, whose names are recorded; others name as many as 190,000 dead.[52] Given the initially unchecked murder, it may be assumed that many victims were not known by name, so the truth may lie closer to the higher estimate.

One of the few bishops to escape the massacres was Bar Shaba. The *Chronicle of Seert* reports that around 363 Bar Shaba allegedly cured Shapur's sister and wife Shirahan of a mental illness, whereupon she had herself baptized. Although the conversion from Zoroastrianism to Christianity brought the death penalty, the shah spared his sister and kept her from the fate of his Christian concubine Estassa, who suffered a martyr's death. He married Shirahan to the governor of the eastern Iranian city of Merv and sent her there for her protection. She took Bar Shaba, who had been named bishop, with her to Merv, where she undertook the building of several churches. Since his name appears in the list of participants in the episcopal synod of 424, there existed such a bishop around 420. Missionaries fanned out from Merv through the province of Khorassan and farther to the east to the White Huns. It appears that the province of Khorassan, far from the capital, largely escaped the persecutions. The Russian archaeologists G.A. Pugachenkova and G.A. Dreswanskaya discovered in Merv

The Nestorian Church called Khoruba Koshuk, north of Merv, after its restoration in 2012.

the remains of a church, a presumed Christian monastery, and of Christian sepultures.[53]

The accession to the throne of Shapur III (ruled 383–388) marked a positive change for the Christians, as he renewed diplomatic contact with Byzantium. When the White Huns threatened the northern borders of both empires around 395, the one-time enemies moved closer together. The successor of Vahram IV (ruled 388–399), Yazdgerd I (ruled 399–420), also continued the policy of détente pursued by his two predecessors. His pro-Christian position grew out of political considerations, since in times of peace with Byzantium the Christians represented valuable allies, who enabled the shah to extricate himself somewhat from the clutches of the nobility and the Mobeds. In 410 Yazdgerd issued an edict of toleration, which granted the Christians freedom of worship;[54] as before, however, apostate Zoroastrians faced the death penalty. Nevertheless, Christian missionaries were now free to convert the pagans, living mainly in northern Iran, who worshipped planets, mountains, trees, fish and wooden idols. Missionary activity among the Manichees and Marcionites was likewise allowed. In order to create a lasting counterweight to the Zoroastrian clergy, the shah encouraged the Christian bishops to convene a synod, under the leadership of the Byzantine envoy Bishop Maruta, in the capital for the purpose of establishing a new hierarchy.

For the Zoroastrian magicians and Mobeds, however, the rapid growth of the Church, which met with approval even in the highest levels of the nobility, was a thorn in the side. At the same time, they tried without success to convert the Christian Armenians to the doctrine of Zarathustra by means of crude violence, leading to serious tensions with Byzantium. Yazdgerd thus came under pressure from the jealous clergy, the power-hungry nobility and the frustrated military. Rebellion against the king threatened. The aggressive and thoughtless behaviour of a few Christian clerics, such as the priest Hashu and the ascetic Narsai, both of whom desecrated and destroyed a fire temple, provided the pretext

for renewed pogroms. The refusal of the guilty parties to atone for their crimes by rebuilding the temple resulted in a persecution of incredible force.[55] 'The city squares echoed with people who were being tortured in prison with violence and cunning. The decorated churches were destroyed, their mortar strewn about; from the roofs, once so glorious to behold, bridges were made. No church remained standing.'[56] Yazdgerd's successor, Vahram V (ruled 421–438), further intensified the extensive persecutions and had the Christian cemeteries desecrated.[57] Christians fled in massive numbers to the Byzantine Empire. But, when the shah demanded the handing over of the refugees from Emperor Theodosius II, the latter entered Mesopotamia in 422 and imposed a peace agreement on the shah that explicitly maintained freedom of religion for the Christians in the Sassanian Empire and the Zoroastrians in Byzantium.

The Christians were granted only a brief respite, for with the ascension of Yazdgerd II (ruled 438–457) the throne was occupied by a king fundamentally hostile to Christianity, who wanted to cleanse his empire of all non-Zoroastrian religions. From 445 to 457 persecutions raged in Mesopotamia and Armenia, where the patriarch was also numbered among the victims. The worst massacre took place in 446/447 in the metropolitan see of Karka of Beit Selok, modern Kirkuk, where ten bishops and the enormous number of 153,000 faithful were allegedly slaughtered. At the end of the massacre, the leading Mobed, Tahmyezgard, professed Christianity, whereupon the king had him crucified upside down.[58] Yazdgerd's death in 457 brought an end to the pogroms, since Hormizd III (ruled 457–459) and Piroz I (ruled 459–484) were well disposed towards the Christians. However, in the final year of his reign Piroz forbade Christianity, resulting in another wave of persecution. Piroz's death in a battle against the White Huns soon saved the Christians. The general pogroms ended with Piroz; later martyrs were individuals who, in most cases, were apostate converts from the state religion.

It is truly astounding that the Christians accepted their martyrdom practically without resistance, and no rebellion arose. Presumably the inner fire of faith and the ideal of following Christ absorbed all the vital energies of the victims, so that armed opposition was not an option. However, around 542 Shah Chosrau I (ruled 531–579) did not dare to carry out a death sentence against Patriarch Mar Aba, out of fear of a Christian revolt, and sent him instead into exile in Azerbaijan.[59] Presumably at that time Christians constituted the majority in individual provinces of Mesopotamia.

The organization of the Church of the East

The clergy of the Church of the East, terribly decimated by the persecutions under Shapur II, took advantage of the liberal climate under Yazdgerd I to rebuild their organization and eliminate the hierarchical redundancies between the East Syrians and the West Syrians who had been deported from Rome. This occurred with the express approval of the shah at the synod of 410, which was led by the Byzantine envoy Maruta. This Bishop Maruta, whose diocese of Maipherkat lay to the north-east of Edessa on the Byzantine–Sassanian border, was in three regards the saviour of the Church of the East. First, in 399 he negotiated a lasting peace between Byzantium and Rome. Second, around 406 he gained from the king the release from prison of the archbishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Isaac (ruled 399–410), who had been slandered by his own bishops. Third, he wrested approval from Yazdgerd for an episcopal synod and guided this synod to a successful conclusion.

The *Synodicon Orientale*, written in the ninth

Life-size male stucco figure with traces of paintings from a church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon from the late sixth century. Beneath this church are found the remains of an earlier church. Although it cannot be determined which Nestorian church was involved, the discovery nevertheless proves that the Church of the East also used figurative representations.[22]

century, informs us about the course of the synod and its 21 *canons*, which 36 East Syrian bishops signed.[60] After the bishops had ratified the decisions of the Council of Nicea, they were summoned before the grand vizier and the military commander of the capital.[61] The two Sassanian dignitaries confirmed Isaac as bishop of the imperial capital and his authority over the other dioceses of the empire. 'Since Isaac, the catholicos, went in and out before the shah, he made him head of all the Christians of the East, according to his pleasure. If, however, anyone rises up against him and opposes his will, we should be told, [so that he] will be condemned.'[62] None of the bishops dared to oppose the royal order; rather, they confirmed it in Canon XII: 'We all collectively accept that we bishops of all part of the Orient and our successors are subject in all that is rightfully commanded to the bishop-catholicos, the master of the bishops, the metropolitan of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, until the arrival of Christ.' The above proclamation and the synodal decision were of great consequence, since they affirmed the shah's right to appoint the catholicos – that is, the head of the Church of the East. Not only the East Syrians but all the Christians of the empire were later under his authority, and he could impose his will with the help of the civil judiciary. Since the synodal acts mention no Western patriarch as authority, it is clear that the Church of the East understood itself to be an autonomous and autocephalous self-determining communion.

In order to overcome the hierarchal duplication between the Aramaic-Persian Christians and the Greek Christians deported from the Roman Empire, the synod defined the means of election and the duties of each level of the clergy. Only one bishop could reside in each city and region, and he had to be ordained by at least three bishops after the hearing of the faithful. Then the designated bishop must travel to the metropolitan of the capital, who 'completes' him – that is, confirms his ordination. Every two – later every four – years a synod convened by the catholicos took place, which the bishops were required to attend. Above the ordinary bishops stands the *metropolitan-bishop*, whose responsi-bilities extend over an entire province. In 410 six of these were established, listed here in hierarchical order: the great metropolitan see of the capital, the metropolitan sees of Beit Lapat (Gondeshapur), Nisibis, Prat de Maishan (Basra), Arbela and Karka of Beit Selok (Kirkuk). However, the metropolitan, who oversaw six to twelve dioceses, had no authority to issue instructions: 'he is a help and an encouragement to them [the bishops] in all that is proper. If discord occurs among them, he establishes peace with the counsel of love, not with the force of power. If an issue cannot

The ruins of the Nestorian Church of Mar Shmuni in Beth Bedeh, northern Iraq, which was destroyed by dynamite in 1988.

be resolved amicably, he writes of it to the great metropolitan [catholicos], who is entitled to give orders and decide' (Canon XVIII). The metropolitan organizes an annual provincial synod with his bishops. Upon the death of a metropolitan, the bishops and the faithful of the province choose his successor, whom the catholicos confirms in his office through ordination.

Within his diocese, the bishop is given wide-ranging authority: he can ordain priests and deacons, teach and build churches; the monasteries are also under his jurisdiction. Priests must be at least thirty years old and be able to recite the Psalms in Syriac, 'so that the servants of Christ do not resemble the laity as idiots in word and doctrine' (Canon XVI). Self-mutilated eunuchs – a practice found among ascetics – are not permitted into the clergy (Canon II). Bishops and priests may celebrate the Eucharist only in church on Sundays; private masses in homes are forbidden. To each bishop is permitted a maximum of one *chorepiscopus* as visitor and one archdeacon. The latter should 'be the bishop's arm, tongue and honorer, whose hidden will is made manifest through him' (Canon XIV). Under the priest figure the deacon and the hypodeacon, who support him and who also function as exorcists and drive demons out of the possessed. The important office of bailiff is open only to the laity; he oversees the income and expenses of the dioceses, as well as their property. Thus the Church of the East was supported by nine hierarchical levels:

The once Nestorian, later Chaldean, Church of Mar Abraham in Deir Aboun, which means Monastery of our Father, northern Iraq. The original monastery enjoyed exemption from taxation under Patriarch Mar Aba I (540–552) and was linked with the grave of Noah by Arab authors in the thirteenth century. Fiey believes, however, that these are the ruins of the monastery of Mar Awa, of which nothing else is known.[23]

patriarch, metropolitan, bishop, archdeacon, chorepiscopus, priest, deacon, hypodeacon and reader. As a layman, the bailiff did not belong to the clergy.

The synod then ordered that the feast of Epiphany, the 40 days of Lent and the Resurrection had to be celebrated in common and everywhere on the same day (Canon XII). Finally, punishment for possible disobedience was laid out: 'Whoever dares to disobey these orders, the fire of God will descend upon him, the wrath of God will remain over him, and he will be anathematized by the entire Church of Christ in the four regions of the world. The anathema and the punishment of the shah will remain over him' (Canon XVII). Anathema, expulsion from the community of believers, was the most severe ecclesiastical sanction. Less dramatic was the revocation of an ecclesiastical office, which meant a return to the lay state; milder still was a temporary suspension, from which the offender could be returned to his office after sufficient atonement.

With these regulations, the Church of the East constituted itself as a clearly structured hierarchical pyramid, at whose apex was the catholicos, endowed with nearly unlimited executive authority, whose decisions were as far as necessary imposed by the civil judiciary. However, his instrument of power was blunted if the civil judiciary refused to emphasize the decisions of the catholicos, so temporary schisms often arose. Only the biennial, later quadrennial, synods, comparable to a parliament, checked

his omnipotence. The inner cohesion of the Church rested on the unconditional adoption of Antiochene dogma and the corresponding two-nature doctrine, which was taught at such great educational institutions as those in Nisibis and Seleucia-Ctesiphon. The majority of bishops and abbots of the Church of the East came out of these forgings of cadres. It was only thanks to this strict organization that the Church of the East, which never enjoyed the support of the state, was able to hold its own in an often hostile environment.

Astonishingly, the synod refrained from determining the means of selecting the catholicos. This was settled by Catholicos Mar Abba in 544 as follows: the bishop of Kashkar informs the metropolitans of Beit Lapat, Prat of Maishan, Arbil and Beit Selok, who come to the city accompanied by three bishops each. They nominate the patriarch, who must be confirmed by the notables and faithful of Ctesiphon. Later Patriarch Joseph widened the circle of archbishops who could participate in the election process to include all the *metropolitan sees of the interior*, and in 585 Patriarch Ishoyahb I added that in times of crisis, such as persecutions, a minimum of three metropolitans would suffice.[63] Practice showed, however, that a candidate could hardly succeed without the consent of the shah. Notable among the criteria for election is the fact that the faithful of each diocese had the right to participate in the selection of the bishop and could successfully boycott bishops imposed upon them from the outside. In light of the lack of interest in their Church on the part of many West European Christians today, the question arises of whether such direct democracy in the selection of clergy might not help reduce the obvious distance between clergy and faithful.

The celibacy of East Syrian clerics was a thorn in the side of the Zoroastrians and offered them a perpetual target. In order to take the wind out of the Mobeds' sails in this regard, the synod of Patriarch Acacius (in office 485–496) declared in 486 that 'from now on, no bishop may ordain anyone to the diaconate [which was the entryway to a career in the clergy] unless he lives in a legal union and begets children'.[64] This canon imposed marriage upon candidates for a clerical career. The driving force behind this decision was the controversial metropolitan of Nisibis, Bar Sauma (†496), who was powerful because of his friendship with Shah Piroz and who had a relationship with a concubine, a nun.[65] Celibacy was permitted only for monks. Since many bishops were appointed from the monastic community, bishops lived celibately despite the synod's declaration. The 497 synod of Catholicos Babai (497–502) confirmed not only the decisions of the synod of 486 but also ordered that all clergy in the Church of the East, 'from the patriarch to the lowest-ranking, enter into a public bond of matrimony with a woman and produce children'.[66] Given the scandals involving child abuse and the illegitimate children of priests and bishops that have shocked the modern Catholic Church,[67] the argument of Catholicos Acacius that 'it is much better to take a wife than to burn with desire'[68] seems sensible. In this regard, Acacius could appeal to the First Letter to the Corinthians: 'For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion' (1 Cor 7:9). In 544, however, Mar Aba I annulled the marriage requirement for patriarchs and declared that they had to remain celibate.[69] For bishops, on the other hand, marriage was permitted until the twelfth century.

As a consequence of the rapid expansion of the Church of the East, it became necessary to adapt the duties and rights of outlying metropolitan sees to their geographical circumstances and to create two categories of archbishops. First were those entitled to elect the catholicos, the metropolitan sees of the interior, who covered the heartland of the Church of the East. These were, in hierarchical order, the metropolitan see of the patriarch, as well as the provinces of 1, Beit

(Right) The old Nestorian Church of Mar Giwargis in Bidial, northern Iraq. The name Bidial is derived from the Syriac Beit El, which means House of God. The church, which dates from the sixth century, was destroyed by Saddam Hussein's troops during the so-called Anfal campaign in 1988 and rebuilt shortly thereafter.

(Bottom) Iraqi Christians in Khabur, north-eastern Syria.

Lapat; 2, Nisibis; 3, Prat de Maishan (Basra); 4, Mosul; 5, Arbela; 6, Beit Selok (Kirkuk); and 7, at times Halwan in western Iran. Second were the *metropolitan sees of the outer regions*, which were farther away from the capital and thus not entitled to vote for the catholicos. According to a fourteenth-century history these allegedly included the following archdioceses: 8, Jerusalem; 9, Edessa; 10, Rew Ardashir in Fars (southern Iran); 11, Merv in Khorassan (Turkmenistan); 12, Herat (Afghanistan); 13, Fatraba (Qatar); 14, China (possibly today's Beijing); 15, India; 16, Barda (in today's Azerbaijan); 17, Damascus; 18, Ray near Teheran; 19, Tabaristan (northern Iran); 20, Dailam on the Caspian Sea; 21, Samarqand; 22, Turkistan (Southern Kazakhstan?); 23, Halih (location unsure); 24, Sigistan (Seistan in south-western Afghanistan); 25, Khan Baliq (today's Beijing) or much more probable Jan Baliq (Beshbaliq north-east of Turfan in Xinjiang) and Alfaliq (Almalik in north-western Xinjiang, China); 26, Tangut (the provinces of Gansu and Ningxia, as well as the Ordos region of China); and 27, Kashgar and Nawakat (in western Xinjiang and in Kyrgyzstan).[70] In addition, there had long been the metropolitan see of Atropatene in Azerbaijan. Around the tenth century Cairo and Alexandria were also metropolitan sees. Towards the end of the eighth century there may have been a metropolitan see of Tibet, as well.[71] At that time, the Church of the East extended from west to east over more than eighty degrees of latitude, from the Euphrates to Manchuria and the Yellow Sea, a distance corresponding to over 7000 kilometres.

In contrast to the archbishops of the interior, who were elected by the clergy and their laity, the patriarch himself nominated the metropolitans of the outer regions, with the exception of the sees of Rew Ardashir in Fars and, at times, Ray near Teheran. The nominees were almost always monastic missionaries from the Mesopotamian heartland. The archbishops of the outer regions

The 3620-metre-high mountain range of Dare Rosh in Azerbaijan, Iran, divides the plains of Urmiah from the Kurdish mountain region. Today Urmiah is, besides Teheran, the most important stronghold of the Church of the East in Iran.

possessed greater autonomy than did their colleagues in the interior, since they did not have to participate in the patriarch's synods. It sufficed for them to send the patriarch a written report, including a creed and a description of the current state of affairs, once every six years. Furthermore, the metropolitans could themselves consecrate their bishops, without these having to go to the patriarch for confirmation. Most of the dioceses of Asia had their see in a city, but there were also bishops assigned to nomadic peoples, who adapted their residence to the migration patterns of their charges. Because of the huge expanse of certain archdioceses in the outer regions, the metropolitans and bishops had at their disposal several archdeacons and chorepiscopi.[72]

In order to strengthen the unity of the Church, Syriac was used as the liturgical language in all provinces and dioceses. However, during worship the hymns were sung and the Scripture read in the vernacular language, and the same was true of the sermons. In contrast to Islam, which forbids the translation of the Koran, conveyed to the prophet Mohammed by God in Arabic, the Nestorians translated missals, hymns and psalms, as well as excerpts from the New Testament, into local languages. So there have been discovered in Central Asia ancient documents in Middle Persian (Pahlavi), Arabic, Old Turkish, Sogdian, Uigur, Mongolian and Chinese.

The final declaration of independence of the Church of the East

'The Oriental bishops may no longer appeal to the Western patriarchs against their [own] patriarch. Rather every judgement that does not find its resolution before him shall be preserved for the judgement of Christ. [The patriarch] shall judge all his subjects; judgement over him, however, shall be reserved for Christ, who chose him, elevated him, and placed him at the head of his Church' (Synodal statement of 424).[73]

The synod of 424 was, after that of 410, the most important episcopal conference of the Church of the East. In the background of this synod stood renewed intra-ecclesiastical disputes and turmoil during the persecutions of 420–422. First, Yazdgerd I deposed Patriarch Ma'na (in office 420) – who was supported by a military leader – because he would not carry out the reconstruction of destroyed fire temples. He was followed by Patriarch Dadisho (in office 421–456), who was legitimately elected, but jealous bishops slandered him as a Roman spy before Shah Vahram V, who threw him in prison. The rebellious bishops did not shy away from getting help from Zoroastrians and another leader of the army and appointing an anti-patriarch, Faraboht (in office 421), whom the majority of bishops rejected.[74] After the establishment of Byzantine–Sassanian peace in 422, Dadisho was released, whereupon he returned embittered to his Monastery of Noah's Ark on Mount Djudi. Only when, at the synod, all six metropolitans and 30 additional bishops tearfully implored him to return to his office did he agree.[75]

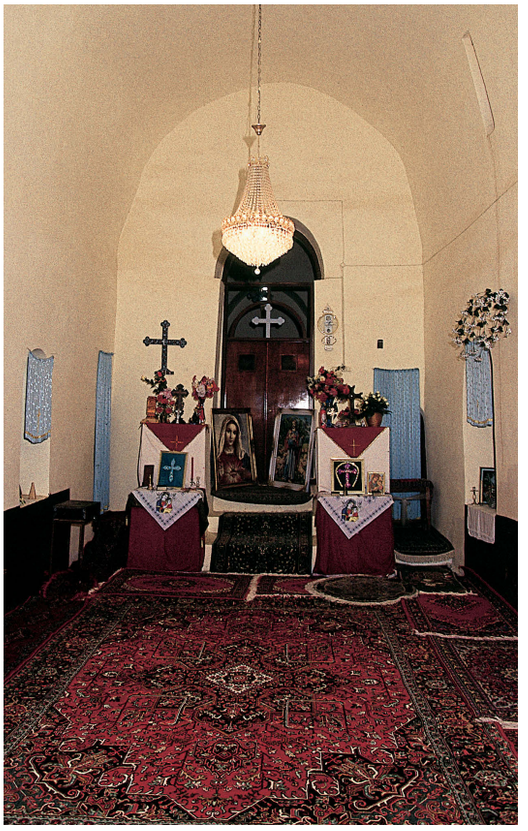
The synod of 424 confirmed the autocephaly of the Church of the East and the absolute primacy of its patriarch-catholicos. It is Christ himself who appoints the patriarch, as he once had Peter, as his vicar on Earth. Only he can judge him, not the bishops subordinate to him. This declaration of independence did not imply a schism, since the creed of Nicea provided a common foundation with the Western patriarchates. However, the patriarch of the Church of the East is on an equal footing with the Western patriarchs and is as such fully autonomous in his actions. In this vision, the universal Church consists not in a single, global hierarchy but rather in an ecumenical communion of independent Churches.

The Church of Mar Giwargis in Khosrow Abad near Delemon (Salmas), Azerbaijan, Iran, whose bishop, according to tradition, participated in the Council of Nicea in 325. The inscription in the stone above the portal reports that the first structure was erected in 520. The church, which dates from the eleventh century and was restored by Catholic missionaries in 1845, was destroyed by an earthquake in 1930.

After the closing of the School in Nisibis in 363 it resumed its teaching around 457, thanks to the initiative of Bishop Barsauma (†496). In 449, while still a student, Barsauma had to flee Edessa when Monophysite agitators deposed the Dyophysite bishop of Edessa, Ibas (in office 435–457), for a short time. In 457 a second exodus of adherents of the Antiochene-Dyophysite theology began with the death of Ibas, who had been restored to his office. Then, in 471, when the renowned theologian and poet Narsai (†503) left Edessa in great haste on account of renewed unrest, Bishop Barsauma persuaded him to take over leadership of the School of Nisibis. When Emperor Zeno closed the School of the Persians in Edessa in 489 he finally drove the Antiochene-

Dyophysite theology out of the Byzantine Empire. With the establishment of the School of Nisibis within the Sassanian Empire, an end was brought to the anachronism that the East Syrian patriarchal see was in the Sassanian capital, but the educational centre for the higher clergy was in the hostile Eastern Roman Empire. Nisibis now became the theological élite school of the Church of the East. Thanks to Narsai, nicknamed 'the harp of the Holy Spirit', the theology of Theodore of Mopsuestia, whose work he helped translate from Greek into Syriac, became the standard for East Syrian orthodoxy.[76] The study of the works of Aristotle and his students supplemented the instruction in biblical exegesis. And so in Nisibis, Greek ideas and Syrian culture came into contact with one another; the School became the gate through which Greek culture captured the mind of Mesopotamia.

In its heyday the School of Nisibis had about 1000 students, whose lives were governed by monastic principles. At least for the duration of their studies, they had to forgo worldly pleasures, take a vow of chastity and, presumably, also place their personal possessions at the disposal of the community. The curriculum was divided into two cycles. In the first, students learned correctly to read, write and recite from memory the Psalms. The second cycle included philosophy, rhetoric and, above all, exegesis, which, in accordance with the Antiochene historical understanding of the Bible, interpreted Scripture in its literal sense. Geography, astronomy, secular history, and as a separate course of study, medicine came later.



The nave of the Church of St Sergius in Bos Vatch. Beneath the church is an incubation room still used today by both Christians and Muslims, in which mentally ill people are healed overnight by relics encased in the walls.

The confession of Dyophysite Christology and the dispute with the Miaphysite Jacobites

The theological alienation between West and East began not with the Church of the East but, rather, with the Roman-Byzantine state Church. It was the Council of Chalcedon – in which, for political reasons, no representatives of Seleucia-Ctesiphon participated – that accepted a moderate Antiochene Christology yet failed to rehabilitate its most prominent exponent, Nestorius, leading to the first rift in the ecumene. The Henoticon of 482, which was close to the Miaphysite position, deepened the cleft, which, on the occasion of the condemnation of the *Three Chapters* in 553, grew into an unbridgeable chasm. All the synodal

creeds of the Church of the East remained, from the standpoint of Antiochene theology, orthodox. The Church of the East always emphatically defended itself against the Western charge of making Christ into 'two Sons' and thus turning the Trinity into a quaternity.

In 486 the synod of Patriarch Acacius (in office 485–496) responded to the Henoticon in its first canon: 'Regarding Christ, our faith consists in the confession of the two natures of divinity and humanity, and none of us dares to introduce into the distinction between these two natures a blending, mixing or confusion. But anyone who thinks or teaches that suffering and change adhere to the divinity of our Lord, let him be anathema.'[77] This confession preserves both the ontological unity of Christ and the wholeness of each nature, and thus opposes Theopaschism, the doctrine of the suffering of God. The second canon regulated the status of monasteries and the lives of the monks. 'They [monks] are not allowed to enter cities and villages in order to live there. In addition, they should not hold any gatherings there, whether to celebrate the sacrifice [Eucharist] or perform baptisms, but rather they should enter the monasteries and places that have renounced civilization and there be voluntary for the bishops, priests and periodeutai, who have the power and are the superiors of their monasteries and cells.'[78]

The rapid expansion of the Miaphysite Church of the Jacobites to the east of the Euphrates forced the Church of the East to state its position.[79] In this spirit, in 497 the synod of Catholicos Babai (in office 497–502) presented the metropolitan of Beit Lapat, the second-highest dignitary of the Church, who was inclined towards Miaphysitism, with an ultimatum: either 'agree to the true faith of the church with signature and seal' or be excommunicated.[80] The Church of the East found itself again forced to be on the defensive when the shah began to play Nestorians and Jacobites off against each other by forcing them to hold public disputations. Since both of the rival Churches depended on the favour of the shah, they had to give in to the undignified spectacle of facing off against one another before a Zoroastrian ruler. In the debate, the 'pagan' shah served as judge of the truth of either the Miaphysite one-nature doctrine of Christ or the two-nature doctrine of the Church of the East. The feared Miaphysite debater Simeon of Beit Arsham, for instance, humiliated Patriarch Babai before King Kavad I. He polemically accused the Nestorians of denying the divinity of Jesus, as did the Jews (*sic*), and expanding the Trinity into a quaternity, since they worshipped God the Father, God the Son, the man Jesus and the Holy Spirit.[81] After his rhetorical triumph, Simeon was named bishop-at-large for Mesopotamia.[82] He succeeded in gaining the support of the likewise Miaphysite patriarch of Armenia. Around the year 521 he travelled to al-Hira, the Arab vassal state in south-eastern Mesopotamia, to convert the East Syrians there. But the intervention of Nestorian bishops compelled Kavad to throw him in prison for seven years.[83] The royal favour lay still with the Nestorians.

The Nestorians suffered a second blow when, before 559, the Miaphysite bishop Ahudemmeh so impressed Shah Chosrau I (ruled 531–579) that he allowed him to build churches and monasteries. Thanks to this success, the Miaphysites enjoyed significantly greater freedom in the Zoroastrian Empire than in the Christian-Byzantine realm. But, when Ahudemmeh dared to baptize one of Chosrau's sons with the name George, he was arrested and died in prison in 575. A few years later an internal split threatened the Church of the East when, beginning around 572, Hanana (†c. 610), head of the School at Nisibis, promulgated the one-nature doctrine of Christ and the ability of his divinity to suffer, and also taught the existence of original sin.[84] East Syrian orthodoxy

then opposed him as a traitor to the doctrine of the Church Father Theodore of Mopsuestia. Without referring to Hanana by name, the 585 synod of Ishoyahb I (in office 582–596) clearly condemned him: 'In their foolishness, the heretics [meaning Hanana and his followers] dare to attribute to the nature and person of his [Christ's] divinity the qualities and suffering of the humanity' (Canon I). The second canon unmistakably defends the normative orthodoxy of Theodore's teaching: 'No one from any of the ecclesiastical orders may defame this church teacher, whether secretly or publicly, nor reject his holy writings. If one dares [nonetheless], let him be anathema.'[85] Hanana's position of power quickly eroded, as soon thereafter hundreds of students left Nisibis to attend other educational institutions. Among these were the Great Monastery on Mount Izla; the School of Beth Sahdeh, founded before 580 and also in Nisibis; the School founded by Patriarch Mar Aba I (in office 540–552) in Seleucia-Ctesiphon; and the school in Beit Lapat (Gondeshapur). To these were added the episcopal schools of Balad, Arbil, Kashkar, Merv and Hira, as well as the monastery school of Deir Qunna, south-east of Seleucia.

The city of Gondeshapur was founded by Shapur I around 260 and constructed by Roman Christian prisoners of war. The School, headed by East Syrians, distinguished itself by teaching an encyclopedic variety of academic subjects. In 529 the earlier disciplines of biblical exegesis, theology and Greek medicine were joined by Greek philosophy, after the Byzantine emperor closed the Neo-Platonic School of Athens and Shah Chosrau I invited the expelled instructors to come to his empire. Thus the far-sighted shah, who used his power to promote cultural endeavours, laid the cornerstone for the future work of translating Greek philosophy, medicine and astronomy into Syriac and then into Arabic.[86] The earlier closing of the Persian school in Edessa in 489 had already produced an influx of East Syrian theologians.

It speaks to the relatively relaxed situation between the Sassanian state and its Christian minority that Chosrau had the Nestorian School in Gondeshapur converted into a 'laicized' state university. Indian medicine and philosophy, Greek and Indian astronomy and astrology, mathematics, logic and agricultural science were added as new subjects. In addition, Zoroastrian ethics and theology were taught, as well as jurisprudence, finance and civil administration. Chosrau also ordered the acquisition and collection of Greek manuscripts and sent the famous physician Burzoe to India to bring scholarly books to Gondeshapur. Allegedly, Burzoe also introduced chess into Iran. In order to unite theory and practice, the School also had a hospital and an observatory. With the exception of the Zoroastrian subjects, the language of instruction was Syriac, even during the first two centuries of Arab rule. The significance of the medical faculty of Gondeshapur is evident in the fact that practically all the doctors of the Abbasid caliphs were Nestorians who had been trained there. Only the state library and university founded by Caliph Al-Ma'mun (ruled 813–833), the 'House of Knowledge', superseded Gondeshapur as the state university of the Abbasids.[87]

But soon a still greater danger threatened the Church of the East through the intrigues of the Christian physician Gabriel of Singar, who exercised great influence over Shah Chosrau II (ruled 590–628). Gabriel's power came from the fact that Chosrau's favourite wife, the Nestorian Shirin (who had been childless to that point) bore a healthy son, the prince Merdenshah, shortly after a bleeding performed by Gabriel. At that time Gabriel was a Jacobite convert – that is, a Nestorian – who promoted matters of concern to the Church before the shah. But, when Gabriel renounced his Christian wife

The Nestorian Shirin looking at the picture of Chosrau II. Manuscript of Sultan Husayn ben Sultan Ali, 1485. Regarding her fate after Chosrau's death in the spring of 628, little is clear: Firdowsi's Shahnameh of 1009 reports that she committed suicide when Kavad II desired her as a wife.[24] The Chronicle of Seert*, however, accuses Shirin of poisoning King Shiroi – who took the name Kavad II and presumably was secretly Nestorian – out of revenge for having had her Miaphysite son Merdenshah murdered upon taking the throne.[25] (State Library of Berlin, Prussian cultural property. Ms.or.quart 1665, fol.40v.)*

and married two Zoroastrian women, Patriarch Sabrisho I (in office 596–604) excommunicated him, whereupon the infuriated favourite converted back to the Jacobite Church and, at the same time, induced Shirin to convert too. By his severity, the patriarch made unyielding enemies of the two most powerful people in the empire after the shah.[88] After the death of Catholicos Gregory I (in office 605–608) Gabriel knew how to prevent the election of a successor; moreover, he attempted to place Hanana or one of his students on the throne.[89] Both Shirin and Gabriel advanced their 'Church policy' not according to theological criteria but, rather, out of their personal interests. It is conceivable that Chosrau, for his part, was contemplating combining all Christians into a Sassanian imperial Church.

The biography of the martyr Giwargis (George), composed by the East Syrian theologian Mar Babai (551–628), provides information about this dramatic period for both Churches. In 612, convinced of the victory of Hanana's party, Gabriel arranged for another public disputation between Nestorians and Jacobites before the shah. The leader of the Nestorian delegation was the monk Giwargis, son of a Zoroastrian commanding officer of the strategically important border region of Nisibis. Before he converted to Christianity, he was educated as a Zoroastrian magician. The Christological creed George presented at the disputation bore the mark of Babai, since he had studied with him. 'The holy fathers, namely Nestorius and his followers, declared: "two natures and two hypostases, their qualities preserved in the one person of Christ." The blessed Theodore also clearly declared two natures and two hypostases in the one person of Christ.' After attacks on Hanana, George affirmed the normative authority of the three Church Fathers: 'Anyone who defames or criticizes these three blessed, holy, ecumenical teachers, the pillars of the Church, and their apostolic doctrine, which has illuminated the whole Church, namely, the blessed Diodore, the blessed Theodore and the blessed Nestorius, may not receive communion in this Church.'[90] The creed of the Nestorian bishops, composed at the same time, likewise followed the ideas of Babai: 'We acknowledge our Lord Jesus Christ as a prosopon, the Son of God, born in the nature of his divinity of the Father before time, without beginning, born in the end in the nature of his humanity of the blessed Virgin.'[91] These complementary confessions of faith brought a conclusion to the traditional development of East Syrian dogma.

Although the disputation could have served as the basis for the shah to choose a new catholicos, Chosrau made no selection; the patriarchal see remained vacant until his death in 628. Babai

the Great, together with the archdeacon of the capital, filled the leadership vacuum, acting, so to speak, as the unappointed patriarch. The disputation was a success for the Nestorians inasmuch as they avoided the appointment of a Miaphysite patriarch. For the Jacobites, on the other hand, it ended as a defeat, as they missed the opportunity to take over leadership of the Church of the East. The vanquished Gabriel of Singar sought revenge by denouncing the powerfully eloquent Mar Giwargis before the king as an apostate from the state religion. The king had him arrested and crucified.[92] This denunciation of a Christian by another Christian before the 'pagan' king indicates how poisonous the relationship between the two Churches had become. An official reconciliation, reached by the Nestorian patriarch Abdisho III (1138–1148) and the Jacobite patriarch Dionysius, occurred only in 1142, when each Church recognized the other as legitimate.[93]

Crisis and renewal in the Church of the East between 450 and 650

In the second half of the fifth century the outstanding figure in the Church of the East was not Patriarch Babowei (in office 457–484) but, rather, the power-hungry metropolitan of Nisibis, Barsauma (c. 415–496). Barsauma's power rested on his friendship with the Sassanian King Piroz (ruled 459–484), which he had gained by his work as an intermediary in the establishment of a lasting Sassanian-Byzantine peace. In gratitude, Piroz appointed him as commanding officer for the border region of Nisibis. Since Barsauma had suffered the brunt of the anti-Nestorian persecutions by the Miaphysites of Edessa, he was an uncompromising opponent of the infiltration of Miaphysite preachers and monks into Mesopotamia and a devout supporter of Antiochene Christology, an 'apostle of Nestorian orthodoxy', in a manner of speaking. So Barsauma persuaded King Piroz that it would be most favourable for his empire if all Christians belonged to the Church of the East, which had nothing in common with Byzantium.[94]

But Barsauma was also an unscrupulous power player, who fought with his patriarchs over the abolition of celibacy. Barsauma lived with a nun, which offered Byzantine bishops a welcome reason to charge the second-highest-ranking East Syrian dignitary with fornication. The patriarch, however, who maintained belief in celibacy for bishops, could not succeed because Barsauma was certain of royal support, and he himself, as an apostate from the state religion, was vulnerable. Then Patriarch Babowei turned to the Byzantine bishops and asked them to persuade Emperor Zeno to intervene with Shah Piroz in favour of the patriarchal authority. Since Babowei was aware that a letter addressed indirectly to the Byzantine emperor could be interpreted as treason, his messenger concealed his message in a hollow walking stick. Nevertheless, it fell into the hands of his arch-enemy, Barsauma, who passed it on to the king. As was to be expected, the arrested patriarch was charged with apostasy and treason and was executed in 484.[95] But Barsauma could not reap the fruits of his denunciation – the patriarchal throne – because a few months later Shah Piroz died in battle against the White Huns, who were allied with Byzantium. His successor Balash (ruled 484–488) sought peace with Byzantium and for that reason passed over the pugnacious Barsauma in favour of Acacius. In the meantime, right after the death of Babowei, Barsauma, acting entirely on his own authority, called a synod in Beit Lapat, but the new patriarch, in his first official act, forced Barsauma to denounce his own synod, whose acts were not included in the *Synodicon Orientale*. At the important synod of 486 the Dyophysite creed mentioned above was declared binding.

The catholicates of Acacius (in office 485–496) and Babai (in office 497–502) proceeded in

Deir-e Gachin, the so-called Monastery of Chalk, Iran. Next to the Sassanian caravansary, which lay on the Silk Road linking Merv and Seleucia-Ctesiphon, stand the ruins of a complex of buildings, surrounded by a 250 x 100-metre clay wall. To the east stand three arches made of fired bricks, which lead to a 12x10-metre room, whose apse is oriented to the east and whose long walls are marked by niches and pilasters. As its name suggests, Deir-e Gachin may have been originally a Christian monastery.

relative peace, not least because Shah Kavad I (ruled 488–496 and 499–531) was well disposed towards the Christians, and the Zoroastrian clergy were preoccupied with the heretical reform movement of Mazdak. This movement cleverly exploited the resentment that had built up in the people against the wealth of the hereditary nobility and the capriciousness of the Mobeds. Within a dualistic worldview, it proclaimed the equality of all people, brotherhood and the inviolability of life, and thus it declared the common ownership of all possessions and women and promoted a pacifistic, vegetarian lifestyle. The young King Kavad joined the brotherhood and enacted numerous social reforms; presumably he hoped to break the power of the nobility and clergy. But these groups retaliated and deposed him in 496, whereupon he fled to Iran's traditional arch-enemy, the White Huns, also called the Hephtalites. [96] When Kavad regained power in 499 'he had a few magicians killed and many locked up. He was benevolent towards the Christians because a company of them rendered service to him on his way to the king of the Turks', that is the Hephtalites.[97] Towards the end of his reign, Kavad and Crown Prince Chosrau I had the aged Mazdak and his closest students impaled or buried alive; their followers were persecuted mercilessly.[98]

Later, around 550, the Hephtalites asked Patriarch Mar Aba for a bishop.[99] At the same time, some of the neighbouring Western Turks accepted Christianity. When, a few years later, Byzantine troops waged war against the western Turks, they were greatly astonished to see that the Turkish prisoners of war had crosses tattooed on their foreheads as talismans.[100]

Unfortunately, the Church of the East did not know how to take advantage of the favourable circumstances of religious tolerance under Kavad I; instead, it fell into discord, which led to schism. Babai's archdeacon, Silas (in office 503–523), succeeded him, but the new catholicos 'was married and had a daughter. He was vain, concerned himself with worldly affairs, and loved money very much.'[101] All the same, he cultivated good relations with the shah. Shortly before his death, he disregarded the synodal canons and appointed his nephew, the physician Elisha (in office 524–539), as successor. Three metropolitans rejected Elisha as unsuitable and consecrated the scribe Narses (in office 524–535) as their patriarch. Since Elisha clung to his office and would not surrender, a shameful 15-year schism occurred. 'Each of the two patriarchs appointed bishops and sent them everywhere. In each church two altars were erected, and the faithful went to church not to pray but to engage in fistfights and sometimes even to kill.'[102] At the same time, each patriarch excommunicated the other. Kavad, well disposed towards the Nestorians, managed to avoid involvement; if he had considered promoting

the Church as a possible counterweight to the Zoroastrian clergy, this disheartening spectacle must have stopped him from doing so.

In 539 the bishops ended the schism. They deposed Elisha and elected the metropolitan designate of Beit Lapat, Paul I, who enjoyed the friendship of Shah Chosrau I (ruled 531–579); but he died after only two months in office. The next election, of Mar Aba I (in office 540–552), was unanimous and fortunate, although, as a Zoroastrian apostate like Babowei before him, he was in danger of being condemned. Aba was an extraordinarily learned man, who had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Alexandria, Corinth, Athens and Constantinople and then taught at the School in Nisibis and translated Greek texts into Syriac. His new task was threefold: he had to end the schism, raise the level of theological education and re-establish the flagging monastic discipline. In this last project, Abraham of Kashkar (491–586), founder of the 'Great Monastery' on Mount Izla, stood energetically by his side.

The newly elected patriarch went to work immediately, mucking out the Augean stables of the Church. Introducing his visitation trip, during which he sought to visit all metropolitans and dioceses with duplicate hierarchies, he asserted, 'The patriarchal schism [is] condemned before God and absurd before humanity, like a woman with two husbands or a body with two heads.'[103] He straightened out the Church according to the following criteria: 'If there is in a diocese a bishop who was consecrated before the schism, he will remain in office. If there are two more recent bishops, the more virtuous one will be confirmed, and the other will serve as a priest. If both are equally virtuous, the younger will become the successor of the elder, who will be confirmed. But if both are unworthy, they were both be deposed and a new bishop consecrated.'[104] He then updated the rule for election to episcopal office of 410 and forbade the marriage of blood relatives and polygamy, which were found among Christians, as well. If these rules were disregarded, denial of a church burial was threatened. 'They shall receive the burial of an ass, like the animals they resembled in life.'[105] As soon as Mar Aba returned to the capital, he founded a theological university there.

Mar Aba's work was further hindered by renewed war with Byzantium, during which the Sassanians plundered Antioch in 540 and deported over a hundred thousand prisoners of war into the empire. Every war with Byzantium increased the old suspicions of their own Christian population. Around 542 the Mobedan Mobed took advantage of the opportunity and charged the patriarch with apostasy, the forbidden conversion of Zoroastrians and the condemnation of marriage between blood relatives, as well as attempting to undermine civil justice with his own rulings.[106] The Zoroastrian inquisition sentenced him to death, but the shah reduced his punishment to exile in Azerbaijan, since he feared open revolt by the Christians. For a total of seven years, the catholicos had to lead his Church from prison or exile.

In 551 the patriarch and with him all the faithful found themselves in immense danger. The son of Chosrau and a Christian concubine, named Nushizad, decided to convert to Christianity and was subsequently placed under house arrest. While the shah was waging war against Byzantium in the north-east, Nushizad raised the banner of rebellion against his father, seized power and declared himself the new shah in Khuzistan, where he had the support of many Christians. The Christians were threatened by a massacre even more severe than that of Shapur II or Yazdgerd II, as the Zoroastrian clergy accused not just the patriarch but all Christians of treason. Chosrau first ordered that the patriarch be blinded and then killed, but he succeeded in proving his innocence. The shah then instructed him to use his authority to forbid the Christians

The fortified oasis city of Bam in the heart of the Lut Desert belonged to the diocese of Kerman, which existed until the thirteenth century. An earthquake destroyed Bam on 26 December 2003. (Photograph from November 2001.)

of Khuzistan from supporting the rebellion. Mar Aba excommunicated the Christian ringleaders and forbade Christians from taking part in any revolt, so that the conspiracy collapsed.[107] The patriarch thus spared the Christians the bitterest cup of their history. Exhausted by his difficult life, Mar Aba died in the capital a few weeks after his return from Khuzistan.

Unfortunately, Mar Aba was an exception as a patriarch, and he was succeeded by mediocre to incompetent patriarchs. To blame for this were, in part, the patriarchs, who nominated their favourites, and also the bishops themselves, who in the case of Metropolitan Gregory of Nisibis, nominated by Chosrau II and well known for his strict discipline, elected instead another, weaker Gregory, Gregory of Prat. Only in 628 with Ishoyahb II (in office 628–646) did a patriarch endowed with the skills of a statesman ascend to the see of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Seen from a distance, Ishoyahb II preserved the integrity of the Church in the turbulent period of the five-year-long civil war from 628 to 633 and the subsequent Arab conquest. However, the Church of the East missed the opportunity to use its numerical strength – at the time of the Arab invasion, almost half the imperial population was Christian – to become the state religion. The history of the Middle East would have taken a different course had a united Christian,

Byzantine–Sassanian front opposed the attacking Arabs. But both the Byzantines and the Sassanians oppressed their minorities, so the Miaphysites of Syria and Egypt, as well as the Christians of Iran, greeted the Arabs as liberators.

Chosrau I named as Mar Aba's successor his personal physician Joseph (in office 552–567), who revealed himself as a greedy tyrant and had rebellious bishops arrested on the spot. Although an episcopal conference deposed him in 567, Joseph held onto his office for another three years, thanks to royal support. Only a parable first told by the physician Moses of Nisibis enabled the shah to change his mind. 'A generous king once gave a poor man an elephant. Arriving at home, the man noticed that the door was too small for the elephant and, unless he tore down the wall, the house was also too small for the animal. And, incidentally, he would be unable to feed it. The poor man returned to the king and implored him to take back the elephant. The king agreed and took it back.' Chosrau understood the suggestion and asked Moses what he wanted from him. 'We are poor and would be very grateful to the king if he would take back his elephant.' The shah agreed to Joseph's removal, whereupon the bishops chose Ezekiel (in office 570–582) as their head.[108] In order to prove his loyalty to the king, Ezekiel accompanied him in 576 on his renewed campaign against Byzantium, during which the fortified border city of Dara was conquered and the nearby Qartmin Monastery in Tur Abdin went up in flames.[109]

Chosrau was succeeded by Shah Hormizd IV (ruled 579–590), who was very kindly disposed towards the Christians. When the leading Mobeds protested his balanced policy towards religious minorities, the shah replied with an analogy: 'As our royal throne has four legs and cannot stand on only the front two without also supporting itself on the two in the rear, so also must our religion rest not only on the Zoroastrians but also on the Christians, Jews and other minorities.'[110] When upon Ezekiel's death the bishops could not decide between the two candidates, the scholar Job and Bishop Ishoyahb of Arzun, the shah chose Ishoyahb I (in office 582–596), since Ishoyahb had regularly informed him about Byzantine troop movements from his border city of Arzoun.[111]

Unfortunately, this just and tolerant ruler suffered several defeats by the Western Turks and the Byzantines, which led to a palace revolt. With the approval of his son Chosrau II (ruled 590–628), Hormizd was deposed, blinded and executed.[112] Almost forty years later the patricide Chosrau II suffered the same fate at the hands of his son Shiroi. At the same time, the army mutinied under General Vahram Chobin (ruled 590–591), who declared himself the new shah.[113] No escape route was open to Chosrau, save that to the arch-enemy, Byzantium. According to the chronicle of the Muslim theologian and historian at-Tabari (839–923), a Syrian stylite prophesied to the royal refugee the successful reconquest of his empire and its fall to the Arabs, who would

Statue carved from stone of possibly Shah Chosrau II (ruled 590–628), at Taq-e Bostan, Iran. This last important pre-Islamic ruler of Iran pursued an ambivalent policy with regard to the Church of the East. Caught between pressure from the Zoroastrian clergy and the religious conversion of his Christian favourite wife Shirin, he wavered between a Nestorian-friendly and an anti-Christian policy. There is sufficient room for speculation that a Christian-friendly policy on the part of Chosrau might have motivated the Christian population a few years later to mount an active resistance to the Muslim conquerors.

In 506 Emperor Anastasius I had the city of Dara in southern Tur Abdin, Turkey, built up into one of the strongest border fortresses of the Byzantine Empire. After the Sassanians were defeated before Dara in 530, 540 and 544, Chosrau I succeeded in conquering it in 573. The border city changed hands in 586, 604 and 628, before falling to the Arabs in 639. In 942 and 958 the Byzantines plundered it without being able to hold onto it.

possess it until 'the day of resurrection'.[114] In fact, Emperor Maurice of Byzantium (ruled 582–602) received him benevolently, allegedly gave him Maria, one of his daughters, as a wife, and in 591, with a Byzantine-Armenian army, reconquered the Sassanian Empire for his son-in-law.[115]

The next decade was for the Christians of Iran a brief golden age, as peace and friendship reigned between the two empires. The young shah, influenced by his two Christian wives, Maria and Shirin, had the churches rebuilt and even gave the Nestorian Shirin one or two monasteries. Again the horizon appeared full of promise for the Christians, as Chosrau II actively promoted the Church of the East, and the Nestorians could hope that he would become a second Constantine and profess Christianity. A military alliance between Byzantium and the possibly also Christian Iran could have mounted serious resistance to the Arab onslaught. But events unfolded quite differently. The murder of Emperor Maurice in 602 ended the Byzantine–Sassanian friendship and began a 25-year war; Shirin and the influential physician Gabriel became Miaphysites and harmed the Church of the East however they could, and Chosrau made a mortal enemy of the powerful, majority Christian Arab tribes of the kingdom of the Lakhmids by having their Christian king, No'man III (ruled 583–602), poisoned.

Patriarch Ishoyahb I had long since fallen out of favour with the shah, since he had not supported him during the power struggle with the usurper Vahram Chobin but had instead remained neutral. The catholicos went into exile in the kingdom of the Lakhmids, a vassal state of Iran, where he died in 596. The king's sister, Hind the Younger, buried him in a monastery she had founded.[116]

The Lakhmids, who originated in Yemen, began to create a kingdom in the third century CE with its capital at al-Hira, which lay a few kilometres south of modern Kufa. Al-Hira's wealth was based on its position as a crossroads, since caravan routes led out from there to the south to Mecca and Yathrib (later Medina)

and to Najran and Yemen. Presumably the Christianization of al-Hira was a result of the persecutions of Shapur II, when Christians fled to the tolerant Lakhmids. The first monastery of al-Hira was founded around 370/380 by Mar Odisho. A legend has grown up around the selection of its location. When Mar Odisho drove out a demon while on an island in the Persian Gulf, the demon asked him where he should go. The saint ordered him to pick up a stone and carry it into the desert. The demon obeyed, placed the stone near the city of al-Hira, and returned to the saint. But Mar Odisho had seen in a dream a monastery in the place where the demon had put the stone. He decided to go to al-Hira and build a monastery there. However, he commanded the demon to stay on the island, where he remains today.[117] The East Syrian Christian community of al-Hira grew quickly, and there is evidence of a Bishop Osea before 410. The city and its environs contained numerous churches and monasteries, to which were added monastic cells in the nearby mountains.[118] The 1931 excavations carried out by Talbot Rice brought to light two sixth-century churches, whose doorways were decorated with stucco rosettes and plant motifs and whose walls were painted in colours. Motifs included a variety of crosses, as well as an 'orante', indicating that Nestorian churches used figurative works of art.[119]

The majority Nestorian Arabs of the Lakhmids, together with the likewise Nestorian Banu Taghlib, formed a buffer state to Byzantium in the south-west Sassanian Empire. On the Syrian side of the desert, however, lived the Miaphysite Ghassanids, whose king was a vassal of the Byzantine emperor.[120] While the Lakhmids were mainly Nestorian and also included a few Miaphysites, their rulers remained, until the last significant king, pagan. The royal wives were different. The wife of Mundir III (ruled 506–554) and mother of his successor Amr (ruled 554–569), Hind the Elder, was a devout Christian, who after 554 had a monastery built which bore her name, *Deir Hind al-Aqdam*. She had this dedication inscribed on the monastery's wall in the Arabic language and script: 'This church was built by Hind, mother of King Amr and servant of Christ. May the God for whom she built this church forgive her sins and have mercy on her son.' King Amr later converted back to paganism.[121] When one considers that Arabic is for Muslims the language of the holy Koran, one cannot miss the irony that one of the oldest documents written in Arabic is a Christian inscription on a Nestorian monastery![122]

Around 593 or 594 King No'man III professed Nestorian Christianity and was baptized by Bishop Shimun. His sister, Hind the Younger, was also a Christian and founded the monastery of Deir al-Lajja.[123] Presumably Shah Chosrau II regarded the conversion of the powerful king No'man to Christianity as a danger. The Lakhmid also insulted Chosrau when he refused to give him his daughter's hand with these words: 'I will not give my daughter to a man who marries like the animals [with blood relations and polygamously].'[124] The shah then had his vassal poisoned and No'man's sons killed. He divided the kingdom into provinces. As soon became clear, the destruction of the Lakhmid kingdom was a serious strategic mistake, for there emerged on the south-western flank of Mesopotamia a power vacuum, which the Arabs were able to enter unopposed from 634 onward. Moreover, the feared light cavalry of the Lakhmid Arabs welcomed their brothers from central Arabia and strengthened their positions. Interestingly, Emperor Maurice had anticipated Chosrau's error when, around 585, he destroyed the powerful vassal state of the Miaphysite Arab Ghassanids and divided it into 15 small principalities. Beginning in 634 the Arabs entered this breach unhindered, as well.[125] Both the Sassanians and the Byzantines destroyed the only forces that could have stopped the Muslim tribes from the Hijaz. The city of al-Hira also rapidly declined in importance, when the Arabs began construction of the neighbouring

city of Kufa around 636/638.

Patriarch Ishoyahb I was followed by the ascetic Bishop Sabrisho I (in office 596–604), who was said to have encouraged King Chosrau II in a vision to go to battle against his rebellious uncle Bistam and prophesied his victory. According to Tabari, however, the Syrian stylite, whom the fleeing shah encountered in 590, had already foretold that his uncle would rise up against him.[126] After the victorious battle, Chosrau decided, against the recommendation of the episcopal conference, to name as the new patriarch the bishop who had supported him. 'We appoint for you [Bishop Sabrisho], whom you need and to whom we give authority over you.' The assembled bishops could do nothing but burst into cheers.[127] But the ascetic Sabrisho was insufficiently flexible to survive in the jungle of palace intrigue. As a consequence of his unwillingness to compromise regarding the powerful physician Gabriel of Singar, he forfeited the favour of the Nestorian concubine Shirin and thus also that of the king. Even on his death-bed, he refused to lift the excommunication of Gabriel.

Astonishingly, Chosrau named as Sabrisho's successor Gregory, the metropolitan of Nisibis, who was renowned for his rigorous discipline. But the majority of bishops feared him, and they elected in his place the favourite of Shirin, Gregory of Prat (in office 605–608). The tricked shah confirmed the election, but with this threat: 'Patriarch he is, and patriarch shall he be – but I will never allow another election.'[128] Chosrau kept his word, and upon the death of the unworthy and greedy Patriarch Gregory he seized his possessions and forbade the election of a successor. Without the interim leadership of Babai, the Church of the East would probably have collapsed.

The murder of Chosrau's Byzantine father-in-law Maurice in 602 offered the Sassanian ruler the opportunity to begin a new war against Byzantium. At first the Sassanian troops rapidly won one victory after another, conquering the region of Tur Abdin around 605, Edessa in 607 or 609, Antioch in 611, Damascus in 613 and Jerusalem in 614, with Egypt falling in 619. It appeared as if Chosrau might achieve the glory and success of his Achaemenian forefathers.

Tur Abdin, the 'Mountain of the Servants [of God]', served as the 'Athos of the East', since it numbered, in its heyday, about seventy monasteries. When the city of Nisibis, which lay to the south of Tur Abdin, fell to the Sassanians in 363, the mountain region remained in Byzantine hands and was fortified accordingly. It jutted like a Byzantine peninsula into the Sassanian sea. At the start of the seventh century a significant minority of the monasteries were under East Syrian-Nestorian leadership; the majority belonged to the Melkite imperial Church, and the Miaphysite Jacobites also slowly gained a foothold. Since the bishops and abbots of the Byzantine imperial Church were considered suspect by the Persian conquerors, they were deposed in favour of Nestorian bishops. The same happened in Edessa. But, because the populace and the monks rejected these new prelates, the Sassanians replaced them with Miaphysite dignitaries, since the Jacobite Church also had no connection with Byzantium.[129] In this way, the twenty-year occupation of Tur Abdin by the Sassanians decidedly promoted the expansion of the Miaphysite Church there. Sometimes, however, the association of a monastery with a particular Church was unclear.[130] Until the late Middle Ages, Tur Abdin, under Arab control since 639, remained a preferred meeting point between the two wings of Syrian monasticism, the Jacobite and Nestorian monks. The last East Syrian monks finally left the south of Tur Abdin after 1838.

In Jerusalem the Sassanians killed about 90,000 Christians and stole the so-called True Cross, on which Jesus had been crucified and which Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine,

'discovered' in 326.[131] The Sassanians allegedly found Jews to be willing helpers, who ransomed the Christians imprisoned by the Persians and presented them with two alternatives: renounce Christ or be killed. At the same time, they are said to have systematically destroyed the churches.[132] For his part, Chosrau gave the cross to his beloved wife Shirin, who had it taken to the palace of Ganzak in western Azerbaijan.[133] Chosrau's armies immediately proceeded farther into Asia Minor and advanced as far as the Bosporus; it seemed as though the shah would finally conquer Byzantium.

A certainly unintended consequence of the Sassanian conquest of the Byzantine Middle East was the fact that the Christians suddenly made up half the population not just within Mesopotamia but within the whole empire, since the peoples of Syria, Asia Minor, Palestine and southern Egypt were all Christian – majority Jacobite and minority Melkite. Presumably it was this complex situation that motivated Chosrau to pursue a more or less pragmatic, balanced policy towards the Nestorians and Jacobites. The shah was undoubtedly aware that none of the Christian Roman and later Byzantine emperors had succeeded in imposing a uniform Christian faith – how could he, a 'pagan' ruler, succeed? If he had decided on a Sassanian imperial Church, this would have led to unrest and circumstances resembling civil war, as had happened in the Byzantine Empire in the fifth and sixth centuries.

The Byzantine emperor Heraclius (ruled 610–641) would not be put off; he made an attack from the rear on the Persians who were besieging Byzantium and entered Armenia, Azerbaijan and northern Mesopotamia in 624, returning at the end of 627 with massive spoils. Then a palace revolt broke out in Ctesiphon, organized by Crown Prince Shiroi and a few powerful Nestorian families. The driving force on the Nestorian side was Shamta, for Chosrau II had had his father, the master of the imperial

(Above) The strongly fortified Syrian Orthodox Church of Mor Hadbeshabo in the village of Ainwardo, Tur Abdin, was besieged by Turkish-Kurdish military units in 1915 and attacked by Kurdish terrorists in 1995. Even today bullets remain in the walls. Tur Abdin was for centuries a meeting point for the Church of the East, the Syrian Orthodox and the Byzantine imperial Church.

(Left) A silver-covered Gospel book in the Syrian Orthodox Church of the Forty Martyrs in Mardin, Tur Abdin.

(Opposite bottom) The Feast of the Discovery of the Cross, which the Church of the East celebrates on 13 September. From a Nestorian Peshitta Gospel book, written in Estrangela, from the thirteenth century. This illustrated manuscript from northern Mesopotamia or Tur Abdin proves that in the thirteenth century the Church of the East was not yet aniconic.[26] The upper picture shows the vision of Constantine, and the lower the search for the True Cross.
(State Library of Berlin, Prussian cultural property; Sachau 304, parchment manuscript 195 Bl., Folio 162.)

The Monastery of Gabriel, which was originally called Qartmin, is the see of the Syrian Orthodox archbishop Timothy Samuel Atkas. The monastery was founded by the two hermits Samuel (†406) and Simeon (†433) before 396/397, perhaps as early as around 350.[27] In 397 Emperor Arcadius supported the first renovation, after which Emperor Theodosius II (ruled 408–450) made a generous donation to the monastery after Simeon cured him of an eye disease. In the eighth century the monastery was suspected of Nestorian sympathies. Over the course of its more than 1600-year history it was attacked several times, including, for instance, in 830 and 1140 by Kurds, in 1260 by Mongols, in 1395 by Tamerlane, and in 1490, 1915 and 1926 again by Kurds. In 1970 it was plundered by Kurdish bandits.

treasury Yazdin, murdered in order to confiscate his great wealth. Shamta and Shiroi – who had allegedly secretly converted to Christianity[134] – had Chosrau and his 16 other sons murdered in 628; Shiroi took the throne under the name Kavad II. If Shamta had hoped that the patricide Shiroi would show appreciation for his leading role in the plot against the deposed shah, he was bitterly disappointed. Shiroi ordered that Shamta's right hand, which had struck down his father, Chosrau II, be cut off, and he then had him crucified in the capital in front of the Beit Narkos Church.[135] Kavad II died after a few months of rule. Since he had, by murdering his brothers, eliminated all possible male successors to the throne, the country fell into civil war. Within the space of just four years, until the accession of Yazdgerd III (632–651), there were ten different rulers, including two queens and a usurping general.

Immediately after he took the throne, Kavad II demanded that the Nestorians name a new patriarch. Since Babai the Great, who had served as interim leader of the Church of the East for twenty years, refused official appointment, the election went to Ishoyahb II of Gedala (628–646). A legend told by Bishop Thomas of Marga, however, suggests that Babai later regretted his refusal of the election. After he returned to his monastic cell on Mount Izla, an angel of God appeared to him, riding a white horse and bearing a flaming sword. He said to Babai, 'Since you have excused yourself from the office of patriarch, and another stands therein, grant me permission to follow him. I'm an angel commanded by God, the Lord of all, to minister unto the patriarchal throne. As long as you were the vicar of the catholicos, from the first day even until now, I never departed from your side; but now it is necessary for me to cleave to him that has received this office.' Babai sighed and replied, 'If I had known that you were with me, I would have accepted this great work. But now go in

The Zoroastrian shrine and Sassanian palace of Ganzak, also called Takht-e Suleiman. A tradition states that Chosrau II gave the True Cross, which had been taken from Jerusalem in 614, to his wife Shirin, who kept it in the palace of Ganzak.[28] The city of Ganzak was from 486 at the latest the see of a Nestorian bishop.[29] The Sassanian palace was restored and enlarged six centuries later by the Mongol Il-Khan Abaqa (ruled 1265–1282).

peace and pray for me.'[136]

The election of Ishoyahb II was a stroke of luck not only for the Church of the East but also for the whole country. First he reorganized the theological schools, in order to better prepare the clergy for debates with the expanding Miaphysite presence. In 630 Queen Boran (630–631), a daughter of Chosrau II, asked him to lead a peace delegation to the Byzantine emperor, in order to secure the desperately needed peace. She also asked him to return the True Cross, as a sign of goodwill.[137] The high-ranking delegation consisted of the patriarch, three metropolitans and other bishops; they met Emperor Heraclius in Aleppo. The patriarch was successful and established a long-lasting peace. At the same time, he celebrated the Eucharist according to the East Syrian rite, with the participation of the emperor and the Byzantine bishops. The only drop of bitterness was the conversion of his bishop Sahdona to the Byzantine, Chalcedonian Church.[138] Upon Ishoyahb's return to the capital, he was accused of breaking with orthodox belief because of his ecumenical worship with the Byzantine bishops and the emperor. But the patriarch was an adroit diplomat, who refuted the hateful attacks with modesty and kindness.[139]

No sooner had the patriarch given his country peace with Byzantium than internal power struggles broke out again, and Queen Boran, beloved by the people, was murdered by an army general. After further tumult the last Sassanian, Yazdgerd III, took the throne. But the empire

Around 630 the Nestorian monk Hormizd founded the Monastery of Rabban Hormizd, north-east of Alqosh, northern Iraq. From 1504 to 1804 this leading monastery of the Church of the East was, with interruptions and alternately with neighbouring Alqosh, the see of the patriarchs from the Abuna family. It is home to the graves of nine patriarchs. The monastery was plundered countless times by the Kurds, which led to the loss of the large collection of manuscripts in 1850. Today it belongs to the Chaldean Church.[30] *In summer 2014, Kurdish peshmerga and local fighters successfully defended Alqosh and the monastery against the 'Islamic State'.*

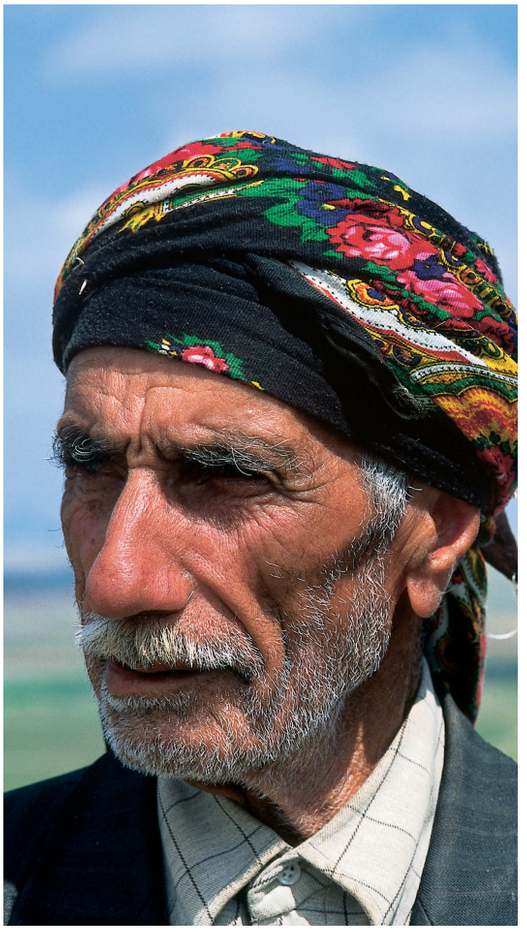
had been so weakened by the two-decade-long war with Byzantium and the subsequent civil war that it could not resist the onslaught of the Arabs. They first defeated the likewise war-weary Byzantium in 636 at the River Yarmuk and conquered Palestine and Syria, after which they destroyed the Sassanian army a few months later at al-Hira and desecrated the churches and monasteries.[140] In 637 the capital Seleucia-Ctesiphon fell to the Arabs, who largely plundered it. Patriarch Ishoyahb, however, had earlier retreated to Kirkuk. The further defeat of 642 at Nehavand in the province of Hamedan broke the final Sassanian resistance. Yazdgerd fled to Merv, where he was murdered in 651 and buried by a Nestorian bishop.[141] Yazdgerd's son, Piroz II (†679), fled to China, where he received an honorary post in the office in the imperial administration of the Tang Dynasty (618–907) in 661 and was granted permission in 677 to build a second Nestorian monastery in the imperial capital of Chang'an. His son Narses, who took the name Piroz III, later tried in vain to persuade the Chinese emperor to reconquer Iran. He died in 707 in exile in China.[142] It is one of the many ironies of history that the last of the Sassanian shahs, who had persecuted the Christians all too often, owed his final resting place to a bishop, and that his son founded a Nestorian monastery while in exile!

Catholicos Ishoyahb II also made himself commendable to the Church and Christians in two further regards. First, he imparted new momentum to the mission to the East and

commissioned a missionary delegation to the Chinese imperial court, which reached its destination of Chang'an in 635 and was received there with great honour by Emperor Taizong. Second, the *Chronicle of Seert* attributes to him the initiative to quickly establish relations with prophet Mohammed and the second caliph, Omar (ruled 634–644), and to give them monetary gifts, in order to set up a peaceful arrangement with the anticipated conquerors.[143] Even if the wording of the so-called *Edict of Tolerance of Omar* given to Christians is apocryphal, there is little doubt that during these turbulent times the patriarch placed a protective hand over the Christians of Iran. In Ishoyahb's day, approximately half of the collapsing Sassanian Empire was Christian, of whom about 75 per cent were Nestorians, 20 per cent Miaphysites and 5 per cent Melkites. The hierarchy of the Church of the East at that time included a patriarch, nine archbishops and 96 bishops – that is, a total of 106 bishops.

Although the Church of the East never achieved the status of a state Church and was subjected to arbitrary persecutions by the civil authorities, it was also able to preserve an ethical independence of a sort often unknown by the Roman-Byzantine Church. The former, over the course of its early history, repeatedly had to make serious compromises with the political leadership, which damaged the Church's own credibility. Among these compromises were not only all the creeds imposed upon it by the Byzantine emperor out of political considerations but also the betrayal of the pacifistic vision of Christ. As long as the Christians in the Roman Empire were tolerated or persecuted, they maintained the ban on killing. Christian faith and military service were really incompatible, even if officers converted to Christianity relatively often. Jesus tolerated the profession of soldier, with strict limitations, but certainly not the active waging of war.[144] But, just a year after the conversion of Constantine, official Christianity made a radical about-face: in 314 the episcopal synod of Arles broke with pacifism and threatened those who refused military service with excommunication.[145] Compared with such humiliations, the ethical compromises the Church of the East had to make, such as relaxation of the requirement of celibacy, were

Bishops of the Church of the East in the vault of the patriarchs in the Monastery of Rabban Hormizd. From left to right, Bishop Mar Emmanuel, Canada; Metropolitan Mar Giwargis Sliwa, Iraq; Metropolitan Mar Narsai de Baz, Lebanon; Bishop Mar Ishaq Khamis, Dehuk and Russia; Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV; Bishop Mar Aprem Nathaniel, Syria; Bishop Mar Yosip Sargis, Baghdad. October 2000.



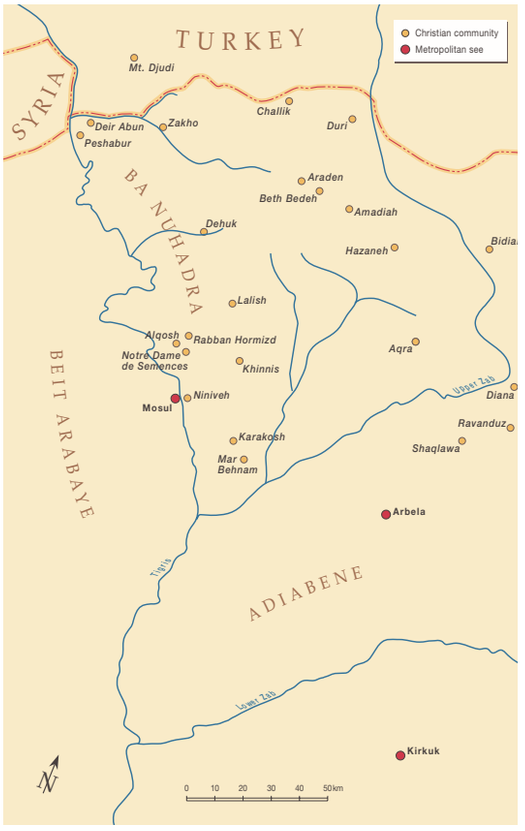
An East Syrian from northern Iraq, living in Khabur, north-eastern Syria, whose family fled from Hakkari to northern Iraq in 1915.

insignificant.

The emergence of the Syrian Orthodox, Jacobite Church

As has already been discussed, Emperor Justin's re-established ecumene with Rome in 519 and the new Chalcedonian creed of Justinian of 536 pushed the Miaphysite movement into opposition to the imperial Church. In 519 its leading exponent, Patriarch Severus of Antioch (†538), had to flee to Alexandria, and its bishops were gradually deposed. Thus no other choice remained for the Miaphysites but to establish a hierarchy independent from the state, so beginning around 530 Severus authorized Bishop John of Tella to ordain deacons, priests and bishops. Seven years later John of Tella also fell victim to the state-led persecution.

Interestingly, it was Empress Theodora (co-reigned 527–548), of all people, who threw a lifeline to the Miaphysites being persecuted by her husband. In 542 the powerful vassal king Harith ibn Jabdah from the Ghassanid tribe, who ruled over East Syria and represented a strategically important buffer state to the Sassanians, requested two bishops-at-large for his people. Empress Theodora arranged for the Miaphysite patriarch Theodosius of Alexandria, who was living in exile, to appoint two missionary bishops granted with special privileges of consecration. These were Theodore the Arab, who worked in the region under Ghassanid authority, and Jacob, called Baradaeus (505–578), who laboured both west and east of the Euphrates with unflagging enthusiasm and mostly in secret to build up a Miaphysite Church organization, which is also called 'Jacobite' after his name.[146] Although Emperor Justinian ordered his arrest, he was able to elude official capture during his continual travels by disguising himself as a beggar, monk or even soldier. According to Miaphysite sources, he is said to have consecrated or ordained two patriarchs, 27 bishops and thousands of priests. However, the unity of the Miaphysites collapsed in 575 with a dispute between the patriarchs of Antioch and Alexandria, which finally led to the establishment of two independent Miaphysite Churches, the Coptic of Egypt and the Syrian Orthodox.[147] Since the Miaphysite position proceeds from the belief that the incarnation of Christ occurred out of two natures into a single nature, the polemical demarcation of Jacob from the East Syrians is clear: 'The holy, omnipotent, and immortal God was crucified and died for us.



Christian places and monasteries of Northern Iraq.

We do not believe, as do the Nestorians, these man-worshippers (*sic*), that a mortal man died for us.'[148]

On account of persecution from the state, the Syrian Orthodox Church in Syria had to operate underground for a time. It developed primarily in the monasteries and in rural areas; for security reasons, its patriarchs often had to change their residences. These emergency circumstances help explain why the majority of Syrians welcomed first the Sassanian and then the Arab armies as liberators. In the words of a prayer from shortly after 630, 'God, You see the malice of the Byzantines, who everywhere they rule cruelly plunder our churches and monasteries and mercilessly condemn us, lead the sons of Ishmael [the Arabs] to us from the south to free us from the hand of the Byzantines!'[149] The Syrian Orthodox patriarch resided from 1166 to 1923, with some interruptions, in the Deir az-Zafaran monastery near Mardin, then in Homs, Syria, and since 1959 in Damascus.

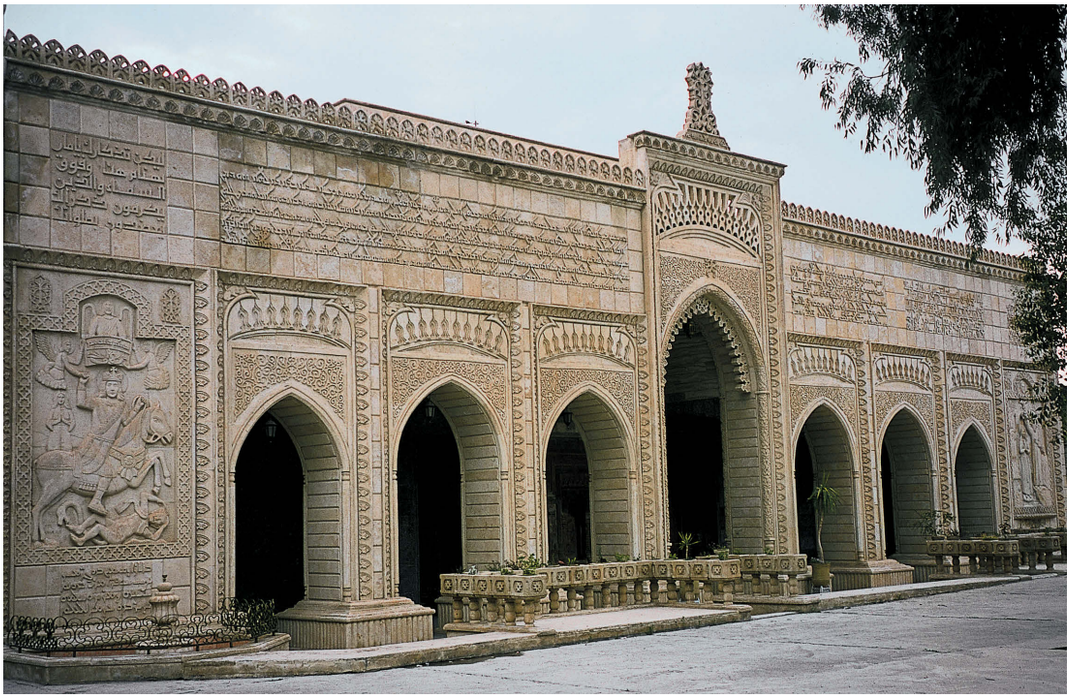
In the Sassanian Empire the Jacobite Church met with bitter opposition from the Church of the East, but, on the other hand, was welcomed by the hundreds of thousands of prisoners of war who had been deported from Syria by both Chosraus between 540 and 614. In addition, beginning around 605 the Jacobites enjoyed the protection of the powerful court physician Gabriel of Singar and Queen Shirin. In the years 558/559 Jacob Baradaeus came to the Sassanian Empire, where he consecrated Ahudemmeh (c. 530–575) as bishop and metropolitan of Takrit. On the occasion of the election of Bishop Maruta, the Syrian Orthodox metropolitan residing in Takrit received the title of Maphrian of the East. The maphrian was named by the patriarch; he had authority over all the dioceses of Mesopotamia and Asia, reaching as far as Central Asia and Afghanistan.[150] Until 1156 the Jacobite maphrian resided primarily in Takrit, birthplace of Salah al-Din (Saladin) and Saddam Hussein, but later also in Mosul or in the Monastery of Mar Mattai. The most famous maphrian was Bar Hebraeus (1226–1286), who worked throughout his life to overcome the mistrust that had grown up between the two Syrian sister Churches and wrote a world-renowned chronography of the world and the Eastern Churches. He found his final resting place in the Monastery of Mar Mattai, 35 kilometres east of Mosul.

According to tradition, at the time of the heretical, then Arian, emperor Valens (ruled 364–378), a few ascetics fled Amida, today's Diyarbakir, for northern Mesopotamia and there founded the monastery at Mattai. The monastery, which originally belonged to the Church of the East, came under Miaphysitic influence as early

The Monastery of Mar Mattai, founded around 370, originally belonged to the Church of the East and is located 35 kilometres east of Mosul in northern Iraq. As early as around 484 the monastery converted to the Syrian Orthodox Church, and was then won back by the Church of the East, but it developed beginning in 540 into a stronghold of the Jacobites. It was entirely restored in 1795 and 1845. The monastery forms its own diocese of the Syrian Orthodox Church. Since June 2014 the monastery shelters Christian refugees from Mosul fleeing the 'Islamic State' IS and is protected by fighters from the Assyrian organisation Dwekh Nawsha and by Kurdish peshmerga.

as circa 484 and around 540 became a bastion of the Jacobites.[151] Closely allied with the Monastery of Mar Mattai is the Monastery of Mar Behnam, which stands a few kilometres south-east of Mosul on the road to Kirkuk. The first chapel was founded towards the end of the fourth century, presumably by monks of Mar Mattai, to honour the siblings Behnam and Sara, executed during the persecutions of Christians by Shapur II. In the corresponding legend, the event is moved back about a whole millennium. Mar Mattai, founder of the monastery of the same name, is said to have appeared in a dream to the son of the Assyrian King Sannacherib (ruled 705–681 BCE), Behnam. Afterwards the prince, together with his sister Sara, who suffered from leprosy, went to the saint, who cured her of her affliction. In light of this miracle, the brother and sister were baptized. The enraged king then had both his children beheaded, whereupon, overcome with regret, he likewise converted.[152]

This legend provided the foundation for the development of the martyr's tomb – originally Nestorian, from 540 Jacobite – into a pilgrimage destination for miracle cures, to which both Christians and Muslims came. To the latter, the monastery of Mar Behnam is known as *al-Khidr*, the 'place of the power to make green' – that is, of hope. The pilgrimage site grew in importance as Mar Behnam became associated with St George, who was very popular in the East.[153] The two saints are depicted symmetrically on the lintels of the shrine; George is defeating the dragon and Behnam the devil. Thanks to these attributes of



(Top) The Monastery of St Ananias – also called, on account of the colour of its walls, Deir az-Zafaran, the Yellow Monastery – lies a few kilometres east of Mardin, on the western border of Tur Abdin. The monastery, dating from the fifth century, was rebuilt by Bishop Ananias shortly after 793 and served from 1166 to 1923, with brief interruptions, as the residence of the Syrian Orthodox patriarchs.

(Bottom) The Monastery of Mar Behnam, located near Mosul, was first founded as a memorial to the sibling martyrs Behnam and Sara in the second half of the fourth century, perhaps by monks of Mar Mattai. It was thus originally a martyrion, which was expanded into a larger church in 1164. Its expansion into an actual monastery followed between 1248 and 1295.[31] Also found in the monastery is the only inscription in the Turkish language and Uigur script in Mesopotamia: 'May the peace of Khidr [the healer] Elias, the friend of God, come to the khan, his barons and his wife, and remain with them.' The khan referred to is Il-Khan Baidu (ruled 1295), who regretted the plundering of the monastery and returned its stolen treasures, plus a personal donation.[32] The monastery, which today belongs to the Syrian Catholic Church, was rebuilt in 1901 and restored in the 1990s. After having expelled the monks, the 'Islamic State' IS blew up the tomb of Behnam and Sara in March 2015 with explosives.

(Top) The Nestorian double church dedicated to St Sergius and St Bacchus stands in the village of Bos Vatch, eight kilometres south-west of the city of Urmiah in the province of Azerbaijan, Iran. The region of Urmiah remains to this day a stronghold of the Church of the East, where over 100 East Syrian and Chaldean churches and chapels are found. Many of them have been closed for security reasons due to widespread vandalism and are opened only once a year on the feast day of their patron saint. The ram on the right side of the picture was sacrificed on the occasion of a funeral, and its blood was used to make crosses on the lintel above the entrance door on the left of the church.

(Bottom) Lintel over the burial chamber of Mar Behnam in the monastery of the same name. On the left St Behnam defeats the devil, and on the right St George slays the dragon. The association of Behnam with St George contributed considerably to the popularity of the pilgrimage site.

healing and victory over evil, the martyr's tomb became a favoured site for incubation. As has been observed by the author in several East and West Syrian churches, there is in the martyrium or crypt a chain fastened to the wall, to which mentally ill people or epileptics are chained and left alone in the dark for the night. The next morning, on account of the healing powers of the saint's tomb or the relics in the walls or perhaps from shock, the afflicted individuals are again healthy. This method of healing is said to be equally effective for Christians and Muslims.[154]

VI Aspects of East Syrian Theology and Spirituality

The dispute with Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism

Within the Sassanian Empire, Christianity had relationships and rivalries with several religions. In Mesopotamia it first built on the basis of the Jewish communities, which logically led to tensions between the two religious communities. In contrast to Marcion, who fundamentally rejected the Jewish Old Testament heritage, the early leading East Syrians, such as Aphrahat (†c. 350), tried to argue that Christianity represented the logical continuation, perfection and finally supercession of the Jewish religion. Without striking anti-Semitic tones, Aphrahat, following in the wake of his predecessors, criticized Jewish formalism and legalism – that is, the maintenance of the Mosaic laws of conduct, as well as the disregard of Christ as the messiah promised in the Old Testament. Aphrahat's *Demonstrationes* interpret the Old Testament in such a way that Christianity is the apotheosis of Judaism, which has now lost its right to exist. Additionally, the Mosaic religion applies only to the Jews, while the Good News is relevant to all people.[1] The *Acts of the Martyrs* also suggest that, during the time of the persecutions under Shapur II, certain groups of Jews denounced Christians to the authorities.

With regard to Buddhism, which had expanded into Iran (it was Parthians who brought Buddhism to China)[2] it was so severely repressed by the sanctions of Kartir that it played only a marginal role during the spread of the Church into the eastern province of Khorassan. Nevertheless, Buddhism was known to Christian theologians such as Bardaisan, Origen, Clement and Cyril of Alexandria.[3] As far as the 'pagans' living south of the Caspian Sea were concerned, the Church had an easy time of it in terms of theology but not in terms of practice, as the people of Dailam and Gilan surrendered their nature deities and idols only reluctantly and after the demonstration of miracles.

The real theological opponents and, simultaneously, missionary fields of the Church of the East were the dualistic religions of Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism. The strategies for each, however, had to be different. Beginning in 273 Manichaeism was absolutely suppressed by the Sassanian civil authority, which, despite severe persecutions, did not apply to Christianity. Thus Christian missionaries were permitted to convert Manichaeans. Conversion of Zoroastrians, however, brought the death penalty.

One of the basic themes of religious thought concerns the frightening and omnipresent question of the origin and nature of evil. In the Jewish-Christian tradition, evil appears as the result of the disobedience of the creature towards its creator. A dualistic world-view, on the other hand, proceeds from an unbridgeable opposition

between good and evil; God, understood as good, cannot be the creator of evil. The origin of evil lies not in God but, rather, outside God, whether in dark matter in Manichaeism or in the 'anti-God' Ahriman in Zoroastrianism. It is the relative value each attributes to matter that radically separates Manichaeism from Zoroastrianism. According to the teachings of Zarathustra, Ahura Mazda, in his omniscience, knew of the existence of Ahriman and foresaw his destructive attack, so he brought forth creation and human beings. As has already been discussed,[4] Ahura Mazda created both the spirit and the body of the human being; unlike in Manichaeism and, in part, Christianity, the conceptual pairing of good and evil in no way corresponds to that of spirit and matter, but rather to that of existence and non-existence. The material world, with the exception of the works of certain demons such as serpents or vermin, is of divine origin. In Manichaeism, however, all material creation and the corporeal human being are the product of the powers of darkness, and only the immaterial light-soul can free itself from the clutches of evil matter. In Manichaeism the body is the tomb of the soul, in Zoroastrianism its vehicle to perfection. On account of these contrasting starting points, different disputes arose between Christianity and Zoroastrianism and between Christianity and Manichaeism.

A Zoroastrian apology

No genuine dialogue was able to develop between Christianity and Zoroastrianism – it was a con-versation between doves. As we can gather from the *Acts of the Martyrs*, Christian apologists accused the Zoroastrians of failing to understand the transcendence of Christ and his all-encompassing salvific power, as well as of worshipping mortal entities such as fire and unintelligent beings such as the sun instead of the one God. They also condemned the Zoroastrian moral code, insofar as it allowed polygamy and the marriage of blood relatives, in addition to permitting animal sacrifice. For Christians, however, the drinking of blood and the eating of the flesh of sacrificed animals was expressly forbidden. Conversely, the Zoroastrians disapproved of the Christian marriage regulations, celibacy and monastic asceticism, as these limited the preservation and generation of life. Seen from the Zoroastrian perspective, Christian monks and the Manichaean elect, with their ascetic removal from the world, each hindered the struggle of Ahura Mazda in equal measure; asceticism amounted to an insult to Zoroastrian ideals. The Zoroastrian clergy accused the Christians of failing to worship the Zoroastrian symbol of divinity – fire – and of disregarding the laws of purity regarding the elements by burying their dead.

While these Zoroastrian accusations concern the ethos of 'right action', a polemical work tested the 'right thought' of Christianity. The work in question was the *Skand-Gumanik Vicar*, a ninth-century Zoroastrian apology written in Pahlavi, whose author, Mardan Farrukh, criticized the monotheism of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as Manichaeism. In the first chapter Mardan described the principles of the Zoroastrian religion: 'Ahura Mazda created the omniscient religion like a great tree, with a trunk, two main limbs, three branches, four twigs and five shoots. The trunk is the measure [truth], the two main limbs are action and renunciation, the three branches are good thought, good speech and good behaviour, the four twigs are the four natural classes of priest, warrior, farmer and craftsman [note the resemblance to the Indian castes], and the five shoots are the five religious superiors.'[5]

Mardan then presented the argument that the finite nature of creation presupposes the

involvement of a principle opposed to the creator God. For him, the concept of salvation necessarily implied a deviation – undesired by the creator god and caused by another power – from the course of a full development, which he must again balance out. Thus Mardan concluded that only a dualistic model could separate evil from the good creator god, while Christian monotheism mixed evil with God, making impossible any delimitation of good from evil. From this premise, Mardan argued polemically against the sacrifice of God's son with the approval of God the Father: '[As the omnipotent and only God] he brought forth all creation, including even his own opponent, out of nothing and led his son's executioners into error. But, insofar as God himself created each executioner and his adversary, without reason or motive, and must have foreseen their deeds, one cannot disagree that he himself was the executioner of his son.' Using the same argument, Mardan continued 'that the Jews killed the messiah by the will of the Father', or, playing on the image of the Good Shepherd, 'It is also the will of the Father that the wolves kill the sheep, for he created the wolves as well.'

To the anticipated response that God granted human beings free will, our author replied, 'If sin is the result of free will and God gave human beings this free will, then God is also a sinner, insofar as he made sin possible in the first place.' Jesus's temptation by the devil also offered Mardan the opportunity to demonstrate that there are, in fact, two antagonistic principles or that the Christian God must of necessity be both good and evil: 'If there is only one principle, without an adversary, how can Ahriman be powerful enough to tempt the son of God? And, if God created this evildoer, then it is God himself who tempted his son.' Then he asked rhetorically, 'And why did he not redeem the adversary like the rest of creation?'[6] Marcion certainly would have agreed with Mardan's argument!

The Zoroastrian apology focused primarily on the impossibility of considering the problem of evil within a monotheistic position without encountering contradictions. Another attack concerned the incomprehensibility of a virgin conception and suggested that Mary kept dubious company.[7] Then Mardan tried to play out the idea of a trinity ad absurdum. If three was equal to one, then nine was equal to three, etc. And if the Son was not less than the Father, then the Father is not more than the Son, which is impossible if the Son is said to have been begotten by the Father.[8] Here Mardan reiterated the argument of Arius, according to which there must be a substantive and hierarchical distinction between begetter and begotten. Finally, Mardan asked rhetorically how it was possible 'that this great God, who rules and sustains both worlds, handed over his body to be beaten and crucified'.[9] The author was also aware of the various understandings of the death of God: 'The talk of the Christians about their Messiah Jesus, whom they consider God's Son but also equal to God and therefore God himself, [is] inconsistent. One sect [Jacobites and Melkites] says that this messiah died, the other [Nestorians] that he did not.'[10] In contrast to Islam, which shares important fundamental assumptions with Christianity and was able to develop a meaningful dialogue with East Syrian Christianity in the eighth and ninth centuries,[11] the conceptual premises of Zoroastrianism and Christianity were too different.

Mani – the self-proclaimed Paraclete

The dispute between Christianity and Manichaeism, a world religion which has since vanished, developed along entirely different lines. It took place over a period of more than a millennium, not only in Iran but also in Egypt, North Africa, Rome, Syria, Central Asia and, especially, China. The range of this dialogue ran

from curt disapproval to the extraordinary coexistence of a Nestorian community with a Manichaean group under the leadership of a *single* shared bishop in south-eastern China in the early fourteenth century.[12] During the period of the second Uigur empire (c. 850–1209), as well, Buddhists, Manichaeans and Nestorians lived together in peace. The last bastions of Manichaeism collapsed in the sixteenth/seventeenth centuries in China.[13]

Born in 216 not far from Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Mani descended on his mother's side from the Parthian royal house of the Arsacids, while his father was a member of the Jewish-Christian Baptist sect of the Elkesaites, who led strictly ascetic lives with numerous purifying and baptismal rituals. According to his hagiography, his calling was revealed to him in his first vision when he was twelve years old. Later, when he was 24, he experienced his second revelation and left the Baptist sect because it was concerned only with corporeal – i.e. material – purity rites and paid no attention to the spiritual purification of the soul. In contrast to the Baptists, who considered the body necessary for and capable of salvation, for Mani the material body represented an impediment to be cast off, an obstacle to the salvation of the light-soul. Thus Mani joined the tradition of Jesus, 'who promoted the purity of the soul instead of the purity of the body and food'.[14] Mani understood himself as the Paraclete proclaimed by John, as the twin of Jesus,[15] who would teach the world the way to end suffering. In this regard Mani made use of the Acts of Thomas and the Christian Gnostic Song of the Pearl to support his claim to embody the Paraclete.[16]

Mani developed a new universal religion, which he taught first in the south-eastern Sassanian Empire and in the empire of the Kushan in northern India, where he also encountered Buddhism. Around the year 242 or 243 Mani returned and received permission from Shapur I to spread his teachings. Presumably it was the syncretistic character of the new doctrine, which brought together the various religions of the empire, that attracted a shah who ruled over a multitude of peoples. But the pacifistic, ascetic and world-renouncing Manichaeism naturally could not accord with the ideology of an aggressive power. Around 274/276, at Kartir's instigation, Vahram I had him arrested, after which he died in prison. At the same time, a systematic persecution began, which forced Mani's followers to emigrate to either Central Asia or the Roman Empire, where they encountered the edicts of Diocletian in 297 and Constantine in 326.[17]

The story spread by his disciples that he suffered crucifixion is a myth and served to

Manichaean manuscript on paper from the early tenth to mid-eleventh century, Kocho, ruin α. Kocho (Gaochang), which lies in the province of Xinjiang in north-western China, was from c. 844 CE the capital of the empire of the Uigurs, whose élite were from 761 to the late tenth- or early eleventh- century Manichaean. The miniature presents a lesson. Above, two electi sit on a lotus throne, with the one on the right speaking and the one on the left holding a book. Below them sit six hearers, three women on the left and three men on the right. The headdress of the four people behind, two on each side, marks them as members of the royal family.[33] (Museum of Indian Art, Prussian cultural property. Fragment MIK III 8259, fol.1r.)

associate Mani as closely as possible with Jesus.[18] Since he considered himself the fulfilment of Jesus's promise, he and his students sought identification with him in external symbols as well. Thus a few of his earliest disciples were called Addai, Mari and Thomas (the names of the East Syrian apostles)[19] he was said to have gathered twelve disciples around him, and his church organization included 72 bishops.[20] Nevertheless, even though the resemblance of Manichaean text fragments to Christian documents is often confusing and Manichaeism is rightfully characterized as a chameleon,[21] he remained true to his two basic principles of the two antagonistic principles and the three ages. The principles are good and evil; the ages are those of the original separation of the principles, their present intermixing and their future separation. In short, Manichaeism is a kind of Christian Zoroastrianism, which incorporated a Gnostic doctrine of knowledge and in Central Asia and China was enriched with Buddhist and Taoist elements.[22]

For Christians, especially Nestorians, this alignment of Mani with Jesus was of course disagreeable. As the example mentioned above of the discussion between Bishop Papa and Vahram III shows, there was a danger that outsiders would confuse the two, as happened in China in the seventh/eighth centuries, since both religions from Iran spoke of Jesus Christ. In order to explain this proximity and simultaneously to discredit Mani, the *Chronicle of Seert* reported that, in his youth, Mani pretended to convert to Christianity and even had himself ordained as a priest by the bishop of Susiana (Khuzistan). After a time, he declared himself Paraclete, gathered twelve disciples and proclaimed his own 'sinful' doctrine. The report concluded with the alleged crucifixion of Mani and 'so did God condemn him and give him what he deserved'.[23]

Because Mani declared himself the seal of the prophets, of whom he expressly acknowledged Zarathustra, Buddha and Christ, it was legitimate for him to hearken back to their partial revelations and systematically meld them into the ultimate universal religion, relevant to all people. In his view, his doctrine was not plagiarism but rather the crystallization of truths that had been distorted by time, accompanied by the simultaneous rejection of the accumulated errors. In contrast to his predecessors, Mani did not place his trust in unreliable oral tradition, but instead preserved his revelations in writing. He wrote texts for the literate and painted pictures for the illiterate.[24] As the crowning apostle of light, Mani claimed absolute truth. Mani's disciples went still further with regard to syncretism, in that they presented Manichaeism as perfected Christianity when in a Christian environment, as perfected Zoroastrianism when among Zoroastrians, and as perfected Buddhism when among Buddhists.

In contrast to Christianity, Manichaeism proceeded from a fundamental, irreconcilable and unbridgeable dualism between good and evil. Both are unbegotten and eternal. But, while Zoroastrian dualism runs right through the material and spiritual world, Manichaean dualism equates good with the light, the spirit and soul, and evil with darkness and matter. According to a complicated cosmology that is difficult to understand, the two principles were originally separate, but then the powers of evil succeeded in capturing bits of the good light and binding them to matter. From this perspective, the cosmos and humanity are, on account of their materiality, works of evil. The cosmic process of salvation has as its goal the freeing of the light particles imprisoned in matter and the separation of them from the evil matter. Within this cosmic struggle of the powers of light with the powers of darkness, human beings are obliged to take sides. The apostles of light show the path to salvation by teaching humans the gnosis, (that is, the saving knowledge), which awakens the memory

of their own trapped particles of light and teaches them how to free the light from matter. Since matter is evil in itself, the way of salvation does not follow the Zoroastrian model of an active life of right thought, right speech and right action, but rather requires the fundamental denial of all that is corporeal and the renunciation of reproduction.

Text analyses have shown that Mani's Christian sources included Tatian's Diatessaron but also influences from the heretics Marcion and Bardaisan. Like Mani, Bardaisan believed that creation arose from a mixing of good with evil and that the soul could redeem itself by keeping God's laws.[25] Still greater was Mani's proximity to Marcion, who juxtaposed the evil creator God of matter of the Old Testament against the good God and his saving Son of the New Testament. Like the later Mani, Marcion denied the corporeal birth of Jesus and his baptism; he thus represented, as did Bardaisan, a Docetic position, according to which the humanity and sufferings of Christ were only apparent. The one-time Manichaean Augustine reported, 'They [the Manichaeans] deny that Christ was born of a virgin. They profess that his body was not real but rather feigned, and thus his sufferings were also feigned. They also believe that the resurrection did not happen.'[26] In this regard it was appropriate that the Manichaeans commemorated the death of their prophet but did not attribute any salvific power to him.

Because the personal work of salvation included the separation of the light particles from matter, the Manichaean ideal promoted a consistent abstinence from activities that bound the soul to matter. This led to a catalogue of forbidden actions, which went well beyond the purity laws of the Baptists Mani had scorned. They forbade killing, the eating of meat, sexual reproduction (leading to self-mutilation), farming, the harvesting of vegetables (only fruits were considered pure), the drinking of wine and milk, possession of private property, physical labour, the use of medicine and washing oneself or changing one's clothes more than once a year.[27] Worship consisted of purely verbal activities, such as collective reading and singing of hymns, since sacraments, bound up as they were with matter, were of the devil.

Since the people striving for perfection were not capable of supporting themselves, and the vast majority of people could not meet these excessive demands, Mani divided the faithful into two categories: the chosen, the *electi*, and the catechumens, the *auditores*, the hearers. If the electi were able to follow all the laws, they could save their light-soul; the hearers, on the other hand, had to serve the chosen, feeding and clothing them. They could hope over a period of many rebirths to accumulate enough merit that they would finally be reborn as potential electi.[28] However, anyone who was neither an elect nor a hearer was threatened with eternal damnation at the Last Judgement, for not all the light trapped in matter can be freed.[29]

The Marcionite position of Mani, which presents creation as the work not of God but only of evil, fundamentally differentiated him from Christianity and positioned his doctrine in the corner of radical and élite world-renunciation, as Jewish-Christian Gnosticism also taught. For them, as well, the body represented the dark and narrow prison of the soul and had been created by a careless demiurge. The soul required secret knowledge in order to find its way back to its lost and forgotten homeland. Since 'true' Christians of the gnosis, who know the gateway to perfect knowledge, could forgo the mediation of the Church, this élitist position called into question the universal validity of the Good News. While Christianity also offered world-renouncing options, open to only a few (of which East Syrian asceticism represents an extreme form) it likewise provided possibilities for living in the world and embracing existence, which were

The Church Father Ephrem the Syrian (306–373) is recognized by both East and West Syrians, as well as since 1920 by the Catholic Church, as a Doctor of the Church. The deacon Ephrem led an ascetic life and taught at the ecclesiastical schools of Nisibis (until 363) and Edessa. He attained fame for his hymns, as well as on account of his untiring opposition to the heretical adherents of Mani, Bardaisan and Arius. In this miniature from the twelfth century Ephrem holds a scroll in his left hand. (Library of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate, Damascus.)

open to all the faithful.[30] A further important difference between the two religions concerned the idea of the resurrection of the body, which was significant for the Nestorian missionaries to Central Asia, while for Manichaeans – and, incidentally, Buddhists – the body represented the greatest hindrance to salvation. For the Manichaeans the body will not be enlightened or transfigured into a spiritual body, but instead it must, because it is burdened with negative energies, be left behind or even destroyed.

For Christian orthodoxy, represented by, for instance, Bishop Rabbula of Edessa (†435), the Manichaeans were terrible heretics, since they taught the absolute nature of the two principles, denied the salvific work of Christ and rejected the Old Testament, yet nevertheless declared their writings apostolic and canonical.

East Syrian monasticism and the Manichaean electi

Although Manichaeism and East Syrian Christianity proceeded from very different premises and basic beliefs, their goals and practice of the highest religious ideals were confusingly similar. This unintended resemblance was known, for instance, to Ephrem the Syrian: 'Their [the Manichaeans'] works are similar to our works, as their fasting is similar to our fasting, but their faith is not similar to our faith.'[31] When one moves away from the frequently encountered view that Christian monasticism first emerged in Egypt and spread from there to Syria and Mesopotamia, the question arises of how the striking similarities between East Syrian and Manichaean asceticism came about.

In fact, the roots of Christian monasticism appear to lie within the sphere of activity of the Church of the East. While St Anthony (251–356) first retreated to the Egyptian desert around 270 or 285, and St Pachomius (290–346) founded his first monastery on the upper Nile around 320, Tatian initiated the movement of the Encratites in Adiabene in northern Iraq over a century earlier. These early Christian ascetics rejected marriage, as well as the consumption of meat and alcohol. The first orthodox ascetic hermits were found in the region around Nisibis and Edessa; among them was Bishop Jacob of Nisibis (†338). When he took office, around 301 or 308, he had the reputation of a long-time ascetic. Nearly contemporary with Jacob was Julian Saba (†367), who retreated to a cave to the north of Edessa around 317. Thus, around 300, there was in Mesopotamia an independent monastic movement of anchoritism – that is, living as hermits; the Egyptian influence of a cenobitic monasticism, in which life was lived in

community, first reached Syria and Mesopotamia towards the end of the fourth century.[32]

The Nestorian Thomas of Marga expressed the vision of East Syrian anchoritism: the saints 'become gods among men'.[33] This vision is based on the goal of a monastic life that imitates the angels, who allegedly abstain from sleep, food and corporeal love, in order to praise God unceasingly. The great exegete of the Church of the East, Ephrem the Syrian (†373), maintained that corporeal self-denial transforms physical being into an angelic existence.[34] For him, the conscious 'destruction and annihilation of the body' represented the most perfect practice of anchoritism.[35] The renowned Nestorian mystic John of Dalyatha († before 786) lauded the readiness for martyrdom with these words: 'O what can your love achieve, O God! Because they [the martyrs] have nothing more they can give you, they have joyfully handed over their bodies to death.'[36]

The monastic life manifested itself in strict celibacy, which sometimes led to self-castration;[37] lack of personal property; severe fasting; abstention from alcohol, meat and agricultural products and the consumption of wild plants, fruit and even grass; the simplest possible clothing, made from wool, animal skins or straw, or sometimes complete nakedness; and as little sleep as possible. 'One hour of sleep suffices for a healthy monk,' opined the ascetic Arsenius.[38] A few slept not lying on the ground but rather standing against a wall or tied to a post, or they tied a rope hanging from the ceiling around their upper body. Like the Manichaeans, the anchorites renounced all care of the body and followed Ephrem's instruction never to wash themselves.[39] This clear 'care' for one's own filth inspired St Jerome (342–420) to remark sarcastically that the East Syrian monks were just as concerned with the dirtiness of their bodies as with the cleanliness of their hearts.[40]

Other examples of self-castigation included being constantly in motion, chaining oneself with iron chains to a rock or the top of a tree, living in a leaky wooden box, or having oneself walled into a tomblike cave for the rest of one's life. This practice, which included the anchorite's receiving the necessary food and water through a small hole and the breaking down of the wall only after the hermit had not touched his food for a month, was also widespread among the Buddhist hermits of Tibet. Several of these ascetic practices appear to be of Indian origin and to have reached Mesopotamia through the mediation of Manichaeism. Instead of walling themselves up, a few monks – mostly West Syrian but occasionally East Syrian – opted to stand upon stone pillars as tall as 21 metres and there to wait, exposed to the vagaries of weather and the admiration of pilgrims, until their death.

Way up to the former Nestorian mountain monastery of Rabban Booya near Shaqlawa, northern Iraq. The founder Rabban Booya is said to have lived in the fifth/sixth century; today more than 2000 Assyrian Christians, live in Shaqlawa.

Beginning in the late third century East Syrian anchorites lived in such caves and sometimes had themselves walled in permanently, in which case water and bread were passed to them through a hole. Kitayewo hermit's cave from the period of the Golden Horde (1227–1502), near Kiev, Ukraine.

Syrian anchorites, encratites and Manichaean electi shared not only an abhorrence of the material world and a genuine hatred of the body – which the Egyptians, incidentally, condemned as an egoistic end in itself and a distraction from the work of spiritual purification[41] – but also the condemnation of all expressions of emotional joie de vivre. In the *Meditatio mortis*, electi and anchorites meditated on their own sinfulness and on death. The corresponding state is also expressed emotionally. And so a Manichaean text states, 'Keep in mind the trembling, the crying and the sadness'.[42] We find exactly the same exhortation in Ephrem, who praised grief, sadness, sorrow and distress as signs of Christian perfection. Since Jesus never laughed but did cry, 'laughter is the beginning of the destruction of the soul'.[43] John of Dalyatha, for his part, wrote, 'Force yourself always to maintain sorrow, in imitation of Christ.'[44] Insofar as the object of sorrow is the passion of Christ, there is a parallel to the sometimes excessive sorrow of the Muslim Shiites over the death of their imam Hussein (†680). That this life-denying attitude was not exceptional is shown by excerpts from a Syrian rule for hermits:

Canon 9: 'Every satisfaction from eating or sleeping is forbidden for a solitary.'

Canon 10: 'A solitary shall always be in mourning, sorrowful, suffering and grieving.'

Canon 11: 'A solititary shall never be glad, laugh and be in a gay mood.'[45]

For another monk from the early fourth century, named Uda, who Theodoret believed

had been influenced by Mani, laughter was sufficient cause for excommunication.[46] As Patriarch Ishoyahb II experienced, the path from world-denying, life- and soul-castigating asceticism to ignorance was short. When, around 630, he sought to open a theological school in the important monastery of Beit Abhe north-east of the city of Mosul, the monks rebelled: 'We are destined for weeping and mourning while we dwell in our cells. If you build a school here, we shall depart.' The patriarch had to give in.[47]

Since the monastic life apparently embodied the best fulfilment of the Christian ideal, the question arose of the status of the laity. In light of the radical nature of Syrian monasticism, it is no surprise that its leading representatives in the fourth century divided the rapidly growing Christian communion into two categories or two Churches: the outer Church of the laity and the lower clergy and the inner, true Church of the monks, nuns and the higher, celibate clergy. The real litmus test was the life of celibacy. Early writings, such as the Gnostic-influenced Acts of Thomas, make it unmistakably clear that there is no Christian life outside virginity.[48] This meant that married couples had to dissolve their marital bond if they wanted to receive baptism. In his seventh sermon, the Syrian Aphrahat (†350) addressed the candidates for baptism as follows: 'Anyone who has betrothed a wife and wills to take her let him retreat. Anyone who has set his heart to the state of marriage let him marry before baptism, otherwise he will fall in the struggle [against temptation] and will be killed; let him retreat [from baptism].'[49] Anyone who did not want to live celibately remained a catechumen.

Still more informative is the anonymous *Ketaba demasqata*, the *Book of Degrees*, which appeared in Adiabene in the second half of the fourth century. It divides Christians into the righteous and the perfect. The righteous hear the teaching, but they remain enslaved to the material world. They labour, possess property and are married, in emulation of Adam and Eve, whom God 'in anger' gave work, tribulation and marriage, since they succumbed to the temptation of the flesh offered by Satan.[50] The perfect, by contrast, follow Christ, the second Adam, and take up his cross in the form of asceticism. Like the other writings, the *Book of Degrees* appeals to the uncompromising words of Jesus: 'Whoever loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me' (Matt 10:37–38). In the imitation of Christ, the cross, which in the Church of the East was generally venerated as a symbol of the resurrection, took on a different meaning, namely that of the mystical crucifixion of the saint in the epitome of suffering. Ephrem declared that the monk should bind himself to the cross in such a way that his ascetic practices become the nails and his obedience to the monastic rules becomes the crown of thorns.[51] Thus did the ascetics become martyrs.

After the perfect renounced the world, they become 'aliens' in this world and received the paraclete.[52] In this regard as well, John of Dalyatha made his views clear: 'Do you want the pleasure of Christ to remain inflamed in your heart? Then dispel the pleasure of the world. Christ will enter into your heart and reside there, if you have first emptied it of all that is worldly.'[53] Between the two worlds, the material and the spiritual of Christ, there was neither compromise nor bridge. Although the *Book of Degrees* acknowledged the inseparability of the two Churches, it maintained that only external baptism is accessible to the righteous, while the inner baptism was reserved for the perfect. Correspondingly, the external Church represented the protective cloak over all people, but the inner Church is the true Church of the ascetics.

How closely this separation of the Church resembled the Manichaean dichotomy is made

clear by the ban on labour for the perfect. 'The Lord does not allow one who is a helper to all humanity to perform work on earth.' Physical labour done out of mercy for the good of one's fellow human beings was also forbidden to the perfect. Physical labour, done for the benefit of the perfect, is reserved as the good work of the righteous. 'Do not be concerned [you perfect], for I appeal to the righteous, who work the land, in order that they might feed and clothe you.'[54] The distinction between the righteous and the perfect corresponds to that in Manichaeism between the auditores and the electi. However, the *Book of Degrees* warns the perfect against arrogance and a one-sided spiritualization: anyone who believes that he, as perfect, stands above the world of the corporeal and thus is able to neglect the physical asceticism will fall quickly back to the level of the righteous.[55]

These parallels between Manichaeism and Syrian monasticism suggest some form of influence. With regard to certain practices, the origin is to be sought among the Hindu ascetics and Buddhist hermits. Since the movement of the encratites of Mesopotamia preceded Manichaeism, the hypothesis might be advanced that the Manichaean vision revived the archaic powers of Christian communities, which had lost importance as a consequence of the rapid growth of the Church. They felt strengthened in their belief that only the ascetic élite truly embodied the spirit of Christianity.

There were, however, other developments as well. The remaining sermons of Aphrahat and the writings of Ephrem suggest the conclusion that for them the sacraments were accessible to all people, which would prevent the establishment of a 'two-class Church'. Married people were also allowed to receive baptism.[56] Because of the sacrament of penance, the Christian community could further develop into a Church of the masses without losing its identity and avoid the narrow boundaries of a community of supposedly sinless saints.

Another development counter to Manichaeism was the so-called 'sons and daughters of the covenant'. They were not monks but individuals who took on the obligation of chastity and lived communally. In contrast to monks and nuns, they devoted themselves to the community by teaching the Gospel, supporting deacons and performing acts of charity, such as running hospitals and houses for lepers. These exceptional groups did not shy away from physical labour. Quite the opposite: they served the lay community with their physical labour.

As a by-product, so to speak, of the religious exchange of the time, the monastic story of Barlaam and Josaphaat, attributed to John of Damascus (c. 670 – c. 749), reached the West. This devotional book, circulated in numerous languages, was, however, nothing more than the adaptation of the biography of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni to Christian circumstances. Here, too, an Indian prince wants to prevent his son, Josaphaat, from converting to Christianity. He tries to protect him, but Josaphaat encounters a blind man, a leper, a frail old man and a corpse. Then the uncertain prince meets the hermit Barlaam, whereupon he leaves his family and palace and from then on lives as a hermit. This legend was so popular in Europe that Pope Sixtus V (in office 1585 – 1590) canonized Barlaam and Josaphaat and declared 27 November their day of commemoration. The truth came to light only in the nineteenth century. The story was first adopted by the Manichaeans of Central Asia, who later passed it on to Islam, which handed it on to Christianity.[57]

The goodness of human nature and the question of original sin

A further, more lasting influence of Manichaean thought appears regarding the question of original sin, not in the East Syrian realm but in

the Roman-Latin Church; the Church of the East, however, rejected this idea. The starting point is found in the sermons of the Rome-based lay theologian and ascetic Pelagius (c. 354 – after 418), in which he castigated the slipshod Christian morality. Here he attacked the doctrine of original sin of the influential Bishop Augustine (354 – 430) of Hippo (in modern Algeria), since the latter's belief in a natural sinfulness of humanity and the indispensable necessity of the grace of God served the weak-willed human being as an excuse for loose morals. Against the doctrine of a sin inherited from Adam, which led to immorality, and a predestination of who would receive God's grace, he placed the conviction of human free will. For him, sin represented a deliberate act, which was forbidden by divine law, but the choice to obey or disregard this law remained within the discretionary powers of the individual. For Pelagius, as for Theodore of Mopsuestia, the original sin of Adam did not result in any universal negative marking of all human beings, but rather in the loss of the original paradisiacal condition. The after-effect of the original sin is not an automatic inheritance but a tendency towards imitation, which the grace of God and the institutions of the Church counteract.[58] The conviction that the human being can, of free will, do good and reject evil, forms the basis of an optimistic anthropology, which attributes to the human person a fundamentally good nature, which can, nevertheless, be led into error because of its weaknesses.

This view contradicts Augustine's belief, according to which God is the absolute granter of goodness. Consequently, all the good that we do can come only from God, and we can call only our sins our own. For the Doctor of the Church Augustine, the original sin of Adam and the concomitant fault are passed on to the now mortal humanity, who, apart from the community of the chosen, are condemned for eternity. Transmission of original sin takes place by means of sexual reproduction, fed by animalistic covetousness.[59] Although Pelagius's doctrine found wide acceptance among the faithful and was confirmed as orthodox by Pope Zosimus (in office 417 – 418), Augustine's intrigues succeeded in winning the support of Emperor Honorius. Zosimus had to acquiesce and confirm the condemnation of Pelagius that had been declared in 418 at the regional council of Carthage.

Then Bishop Julian of Aeclanum (380 – c. 450) objected, lost his diocese around 421 and found refuge with Nestorius in 428. Julian attacked the Augustinian link between original sin and human sexuality – which, *eo ipso*, condemned the corporeal dimension of the human being – and upheld the moral neutrality of the bodily instinct for reproduction. For Julian, the condemnation of the corporeal as fundamentally bad was a relapse into Manichaean dualism. Julian's accusation was comprehensible not only factually but also biographically, since Augustine had been a Manichaean auditor for at least nine years prior to his entry into the Church in 386. It was the lectures of Cicero in the *Hortensius* that confirmed the young Augustine in his pessimistic view of the world. 'The interpreters of the spirit are not at all wrong [if] they assert that we are born to atone for offences we committed in an earlier life.' And as 'Etruscan pirates chained the bodies [of their prisoners] to corpses, each turned towards the other, so are our souls connected to our bodies, as these living were chained to the dead'.[60] In fact, the statements of Cicero, the Manichaean belief in the fundamental reprehensibility of the material body, and the Augustinian doctrine of original sin express the same ideas in different terms.

Theodore of Mopsuestia and with him the Church of the East represent a different position, which is quite close to that of Pelagius. In his work *Against those who claim that human beings sin of nature and not with will*,

Theodore presents the opinion that there is no sin bequeathed by Adam to all his descendants. The phenomenon of sin is not a function of the inherently good but mortal human nature, but rather the result of free will. If the human being was born a sinner, he could not be held responsible by God. Sin is not inherited but rather represents the wilful disregard of divine law, which results from human weaknesses in light of their limitations and mortality. The human person has a tendency towards but no compulsion for sin. 'Death weakened human nature and generated in it a great inclination towards sin.'[61] Theodore also emphasized, however, that the weak human being needs the sacraments of the church and the grace of God they grant. 'Being first judged worthy of grace (by God), [men] are then able to make their own contribution with him, showing their own choices to be proportioned to grace.'[62] An analogy popular among the Nestorians of Central Asia and China says that sin is an illness, of which Christ cured the faithful with his message and example.

One of Theodore's contemporaries, Patriarch John Chrysostom, was likewise convinced that human free will must actively support grace: 'The willingness of the individual is insufficient if he is not also granted supernatural assistance, and supernatural help is of no avail when it lacks good will. Thus I ask you, do not sleep and leave everything to God'.[63] The East Syrian Isaac of Nineveh also stressed the genuine goodness of human nature, which regained its original perfection through the death and resurrection of Christ.[64] The Nestorian mystic Rabban Yussuf (869–979) expressed a similar view: 'The soul is by nature rational, mental and spiritual, like a polished and flawless mirror. Through the first sin it was externally polluted, but not in its nature. For the [original] sin was not so severe as to corrupt the nature of the soul; it could only effect an external, inessential staining. [The mystic] directs all his efforts towards cleaning and polishing the mirror of his soul.'[65] It was these aspects of an optimistic anthropology that the Church of the East emphasized during its missionary work in China, in order to engage in a fascinating dialogue with Taoism.[66]

The renowned Jacobite maphrian Bar Hebraeus also rejected original sin and emphasized the free will of the human person. In his arguments, he objected to both the acceptance of original sin and the Christian and Islamic ideas of predestination. For him, the human being can do both good and evil, since evil is a function not of nature but of law. 'Otherwise there would be only two categories – that which is necessary and that which is impossible – and there would be no room left over for that which is possible.'[67]

From the perspective of Nestorian thought, the course of history is not the salvation from sinfulness but, rather, a progressive revelation of God and transfiguration of creation. In this context, Adam is not the cause of original sin and earthly misery but stands instead as the first instance of the then unanswerable question of the difference between good and evil. The *Book of the Tower* states, 'God, the king of history, wanted to reveal the glorification of humanity and reply to Adam's desire for the knowledge of good and evil. He took substance from him [Adam], in order that the messiah would appear in honour and glory in this body. He raised him to heaven and gave him power and royal glory forever. Through the incarnation [of Christ], which led to the apotheosis, he gave [humanity] that goodness and grace he had granted him [Adam] from the beginning.'[68]

Jesus Christ as the Second Adam, the Tree of Life and the Cross of the Resurrection

The necessary premise for the idea, outstanding in East Syrian theology, of a return to the original state of Adam before the original sin is the role of Christ as Second Adam, which Paul brings out. 'The first man, Adam, became a living being; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit.'[69] This theme and the related idea of the cross as the tree of life was worked out in literary form by a student of Ephrem in the 'Cave of Treasures', a genealogy from Adam to Christ. It begins with the creation of Adam and his entry into paradise and tells of the 'tree of the violation of the law [tree of knowledge], in which killing death lay'.[70] As its twin, so to speak, stood 'the tree of life in the middle of paradise, [which] is a model for the cross of salvation, the true tree of life'.[71] At the time of the expulsion from paradise, God revealed to Adam that Christ would suffer in his place. After the children of Seth, the 'perfect' son of Adam, 'went down' from the treasure cave to the dark world of the evil descendants of Cain and there joined with them – one can see the motif, reminiscent of Manichaeism, of the unfortunate mixing of the perfect light with evil matter – God carried out a first Judgement Day in the form of the flood. But Noah placed Adam's corpse in the middle of the Ark, as a saving precursor of Christ. Then Noah's son Shem went to Golgotha, the 'centre of the Earth', and placed Adam's body there. 'Then four parts split from each other, and the Earth opened up into the shape of a cross.'[72] Later the author interpreted Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac at Golgotha as a 'representation of the messiah's death on the cross'.[73] Jacob's ladder to heaven also 'represents the cross of the Saviour'.[74]

In conclusion, the passion of Christ is presented as parallel to the fall of Adam and Eve. 'On a Friday, death gained power over them [Adam and Eve – that is, human beings], on a Friday they were redeemed from its authority.' 'On a Friday the door to paradise was closed, and on a Friday it was opened.' 'The Messiah became like Adam in all things.'[75] Because the cross of the Messiah – which, according to another tradition, was fashioned from the tree of knowledge[76] – was erected over the cruciform grave of Adam, he received baptism from the Saviour.[77] In his *Hymns of Paradise*, Ephrem wrote concisely and conclusively, 'By means of the tree of the cross, Adam again found the key to paradise.'[78] The Church, however, as Moses had announced, became paradise on Earth.[79] The transformation of the paired ideas of Adam and the tree of knowledge into Christ, the tree of life and the cross corresponds to that of Eve into the mother of God and the Church. In another hymn Ephrem maintained, 'A man, a virgin and a tree were at the source of death. But another man, virgin and tree defeated death.'[80] And so the pairing of Adam and Eve was superseded by another pairing, of Christ and the Church.

The cross is an ancient, pre-Christian symbol of humanity, which, as the two-part linking of opposed points, symbolizes the unity of opposites. The Nestorian missionaries explained the sign of the cross in this way to their Chinese catechumens.[81] In the Indian and Buddhist cultural sphere, the cross, in the form of the swastika, symbolized the primeval whirlwind or the sun. In Egypt the handled cross, adopted by the Christian Copts, represented life and fertility. The Antonius cross, familiar in Assur, symbolized the axis of the world, and the Maltese cross, surrounded by a circle, represented the sun. The over 6000-year-old crosses on ceramic containers from Elam in south-western Iran are presumably likewise sun symbols. Because in the Mediterranean region crucifixion was an especially shameful form of execution, reserved in Rome for slaves and non-Romans, the early Christian avoided pictorial depictions of the

passion. The first symbols for the saviour appeared towards the end of the second century in the catacombs. Typically these grave decorations showed not a symbol of death but rather one of salvation, in the form of an anchor or a fish.[82]

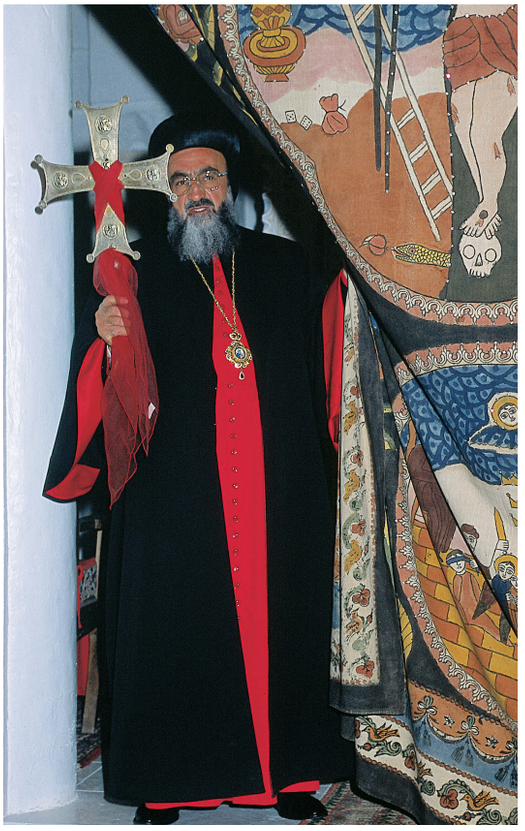
The vision of Emperor Constantine, which revealed to him the monogram of Christ with the words 'In this sign you will conquer', first made possible the transfiguration of the scandal of a crucified God.[83] The widespread depiction of a laurel wreath over Christ's monogram or other representations of the cross without the crucified figure were clearly symbols of the victory of Christ and the hope of the faithful. From the same spirit emerged those images in which Christ sits upon a throne decorated with precious gems, an attribute of the Roman emperors and Zeus-Jupiter.[84] The first depiction of a crucifix is, significantly, a pagan caricature from the early third century, which shows the crucified figure with the head of an ass.[85] The first cautious approximations of a portrayal of the crucified Christ are an ivory tablet from c. 420 and the wooden door of the Church of St Sabina in Rome from c. 431. In both cases Jesus appears to be without pain and has a relaxed expression on his face; on the door, the cross is barely visible. The first depictions of the crucifixion date to the late sixth century[86] – that is, from a time when the Church of the East had long been separated from the Western Churches.

The Church of the East venerates only the original, bare cross of the resurrection; the crucifix is rejected as a sign of the heretical belief in the suffering of God. In this spirit, Catholicos Mar Shimun XVII (in office 1820–1861) declared to a British geologist and Chaldean missionary in 1840, 'Christ suffered once and then entered into glory. He will suffer no more and die no more. Such images are the work of unbelievers, who like depictions of the suffering of Christ, and not of Christians, who rejoice that Christ defeated death through his suffering and death.'[87] In the Church of the East the cross enjoys the greatest respect, for it is the only Church that numbers the sign of the cross among its holy sacraments. No sacrament can be given and no form of devotion or worship can be carried out without the sign of the cross, since it is 'the emblem of our salvation'.[88] The cross also has a prominent eschatological significance, since at the end of the time it will, as the cross of light of the parousia, announce the return of Christ.[89]

Insofar as the tree of life symbolizes the importance of Christ as the Second Adam, it is not surprising that among the East Syrians the leaved cross and the pearl cross predominate, as examples from Mesopotamia and Iran attest.[90] In both cases the crosses appearing at the ends or the three pearls symbolize both the tree of life and the Trinity. In China there finally emerged a peculiar interreligious synthesis, as the two forms of the cross were enriched with symbolic elements from Buddhism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism.[91]

The sacraments in the Church of the East

In the Church of the East, 'sacrament' is characterized as *raza*, whose etymological roots lie closer to the Greek *mysterion* than to the Latin *sacramentum*. Theodore of Mopsuestia wrote, 'Every sacrament consists in [its] representation of unseen and unspeakable things through signs and emblems.'[92] Its premise is the act of faith in divine grace. In the liturgical symbolic action an aspect of the divine mystery of salvation is concretely mediated, in that it re-enacts the salvific work of Christ and simultaneously points towards the coming resurrection. In the sacrament, Christ is the real actor, 'our eternal High Priest', whose 'sacrifice replaces the cultic rituals of the Old Testament's Aaronic priesthood'.[93] In the sacrament, mediated by a bishop



Long before sunrise at the start of the Easter Mass, the Syrian Orthodox archbishop Timothy Samuel Atkas displays the cross of the resurrection. On Good Friday the cross was solemnly laid in a coffin, which was placed over the entrance to the church at the end of a procession. All the faithful walked under the laid-out cross and drank a bitter drink in memory of the bitter cup of the crucified one. After the Good Friday worship service the coffin was placed in a niche in the altar and sealed. On Easter Sunday the cross is taken from the coffin, washed with rosewater and wrapped in a red cloth. This is related to the proclamation of the Last Judgement by the Prophet Isaiah (Is 63:1–6). The cross is installed by the altar and ceremoniously carried through the church before the Eucharist. It remains with its red cloth by the altar until Ascension Day. Mar Shmuni Cathedral in Midyat, Tur Abdin.

or priest, the believer receives an expression of divine grace through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Like the other Churches, the Church of the East began first to use those sacraments that could be traced back to Christ, without regard for their number. So, for instance, John of Damascus acknowledged two sacraments, Bernard of Clairvaux (†1153) eleven, and Hugh of St Victor (†1142) 30. Bishop Peter Lombard (†1160) was the first to name the seven sacraments that the Council of Trent finally confirmed in 1547. In the early fourteenth century this scholastic debate prompted the Nestorian theologians Mar Odisho of Nisibis (†1318) and Patriarch Timothy II (in office 1318–1332) to define the number of sacraments, with Odisho's list prevailing.[94]

The most important sacraments of the Church of the East are baptism and Eucharist, with priestly ordination representing the precondition for the conferring of sacraments upon the faithful and the sign of the cross sealing them.[95] Mar Odisho defined the office of priest as the 'mediation between God and man in those things which impart forgiveness of sins, convey blessing, and put away wrath [of God]'.[96] The candidate must be older than 30 and married and have an exceptional reputation and high moral standards. The value of the priestly office lies in its apostolically founded mediating function between God and the faithful.[97] Baptism, occurring in Aphrahat's day only at Easter and as adult baptism, symbolized the second birth in the communion of the Church. Since baptism freed one from all sins, at first many people of all Churches tended to be baptized only on their deathbeds – that is, at the point when there would be no more opportunities to sin. In the Church of the East it was preferred to grant baptism to young adults, but the uncertain external circumstances often made the public baptism of adults impossible, so it was replaced beginning in the twelfth century with infant baptism.[98]

Just as human existence begins with birth and is sustained by eating, the Christian life begins with baptism and is fed by the Eucharist. Since Eucharist is the logical continuation of baptism, in the Church of the East first communion follows immediately after baptism, which is also directly linked with confirmation.[99] In the Church of the East today, as the author has observed several times, baptism takes place in three steps. After the reading of various texts, hymns and the Nicene Creed, the bishop or a priest asks for the presence of the Holy Spirit in the anointing oil, after which the infant is anointed for the first time. This purifying anointing is the first step from the human being of Adam to the new human being of Christ. In the second step the

Comparison of the recognized sacraments

Council of Trent	Mar Odisho	Patriarch Timothy II
Baptism	Baptism, followed by anointing (2)	Baptism, followed by anointing (3)
Confirmation		
Eucharist	Eucharist (4)	Eucharist (4)
Penance	Absolution (5)	
Extreme Unction	cp Oil of Unction (3)	cp Burial (6)
Orders	Priesthood (1)	Priesthood (1)
Matrimony	Matrimony (7b)	Matrimony (7)
	Holy Leaven (malka) (6)	Monasticism (5)
	Sign of Cross (7a)	Consecration of Church (2)

priest uses the holy oil to make the sign of the cross, symbolizing the Trinity, on the baptismal candidate's breast, calls the Holy Spirit down on the baptismal waters of the baptistery and immerses the baby completely three times. There follows another anointing with holy chrism at the beginning of the worship service, which is held in the nave of the church;[100] this is confirmation, the culmination of baptism. Finally, the newly baptized infant receives first communion. In the Church of the East communion is received in both kinds, bread and wine. In the celebration of the sacraments mentioned and in the exclusive veneration of the cross of the resurrection, we see that the Church of the East has preserved several ancient Christian traditions almost two millennia old.

According to Mar Odisho, Holy Communion, symbolizing the sacrifice of Christ, replaces 'the old oblations of irrational animals and the blood of their bodies'. For Christ 'offered His own body [as] a sacrifice to His Father for the life of the world, and hence he is called by John [the Baptist] *the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*'.[101] This replacement and overcoming of the Jewish scapegoat by the Lamb of God is recalled today in the custom, practised in some remote regions on certain occasions such as funerals, of sacrificing a ram before the entrance to a church and painting small crosses on the lintel with its blood.[102] In contrast to the Western Churches, which use unleavened bread for communion, the Syrian Churches use bread leavened with yeast. The holy sourdough bread, called *malka*, is consecrated by the bishop on Maundy Thursday, and each church of the diocese receives a piece. A part of this piece must be used to produce the Eucharistic bread, since the malka represents the unbroken connection to the bread Christ blessed at the Last Supper. The forgiveness of sins takes place in the form of public penance, followed by general absolution, not as personal confession. Finally, the sign of the cross, because of its power in symbolizing the resurrection and the Trinity, seals all the other sacraments. Its status is also apparent in the *Book of the Tower*, which characterizes the Gospel, the sign of the cross, baptism and Eucharist as the four pillars of Christianity.[103]

In the Church of the East, neither extreme unction nor marriage is a sacrament. In place of the former, they have the use of *hanana*, which consists of a mixture of oil, water and dust from the grave of a saint or martyr. Hanana is administered not only to the dying but also to the sick and to barren women. Even though Mar Odisho did not include marriage among the sacraments, he called it a 'holy estate'. It is

The metropolitan of the Church of the East of India, Mar Aprem, baptizes a little girl in the vestry of the Church of Mar Addai in Trichur, Kerala. Boys are baptized 40 days after birth and girls 56 days after. Confirmation and first communion follow immediately after baptism.

Distribution of holy communion in the Church of Mar Narsai, Trichur, Kerala.

indissoluble except in cases of infidelity, insanity, murder or apostasy.[104] Today marriage is blessed by a priest within the context of a Eucharistic celebration.

Church architecture and liturgy – symbols in space and time

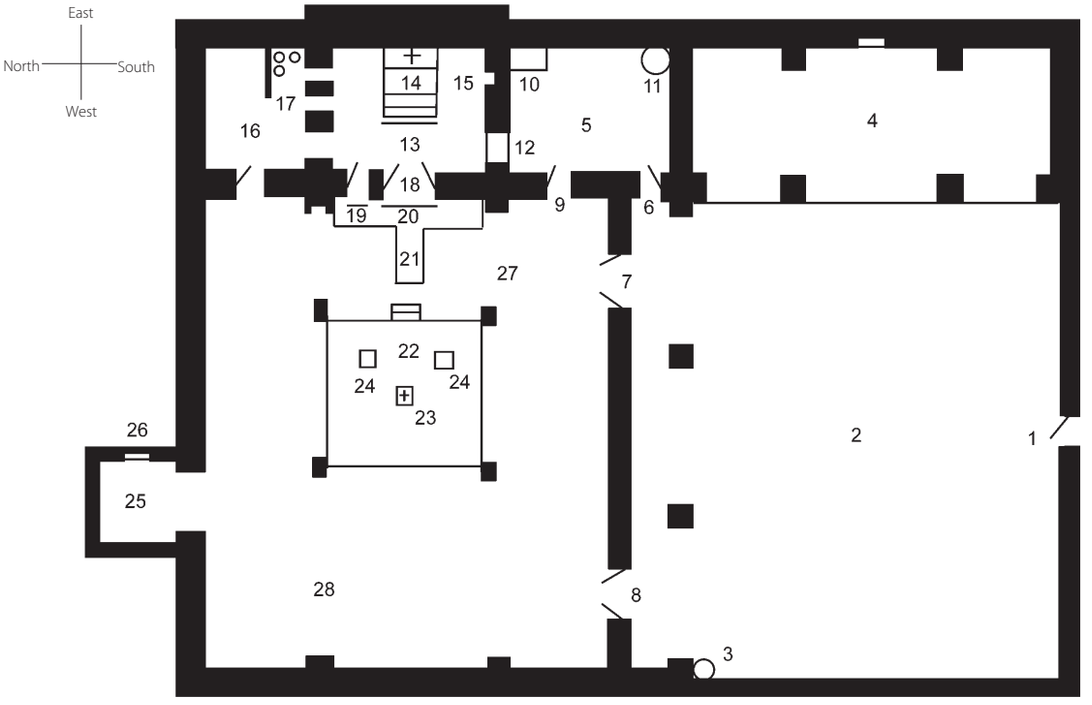
The ancient symbolism of the division of space in a church and of the course of time in liturgical worship is still alive in the Church of the East. Church architecture reflects the cosmic axis from earth to paradise; along the axis of time, the liturgy brings to life chronologically the whole of salvation history, from creation to incarnation to baptism, crucifixion and resurrection. In Syriac, the liturgy is called *qurbana*, sacrificial offering, because it recalls the sacrifice of Christ and his work of salvation. Insofar as the faithful form the Mystical Body of Christ, they are, during the qurbana, both participants in the sacrificial event and themselves part of the sacrifice; they sacrifice themselves.

The Nestorian church is traditionally a rectangular building, with one or three naves, built of stone or fired clay. Its ground plan has striking similarities with Sassanian pillar-halls such as those in the palace of Ganzak.[105] The choir is oriented towards the east, where the sun rises and whence Christ will appear on Judgement Day (Matt 24:27). In the Old Testament the prophet Ezekiel stated that the glory of God entered the Temple through the 'gate facing east' (43:1–4).

The metropolitan of the Ancient Church of the East from Mosul, Mar Thoma Giwargis, celebrates a wedding in the Church of St George in Hazaneh, northern Iraq.

The entrance doors for the people are found to the side on the southern wall; sometimes there are two doors, one for each sex. The entrance almost always leads over a high threshold, and the lintel is low, so that everyone enters the house of God with a bowed and humble bearing. Additionally, the really small entryways prevented hostile Muslims from forcing their way inside the church on horseback or misusing it as a stable. Some fortified mountain churches can only be reached by means of a ladder, which leads to an entrance about five metres above the ground. Immediately beyond the entrance is an anteroom, in which the faithful leave their shoes and weapons. In some churches, the thrice-daily prayers take place during the week in an open-air forecourt, which has a simple apse to the east and sometimes borders on the cemetery.[106]

The interior is divided into three parts along both axes. To the east and in the centre is found the holy of holies, the choir, which symbolizes heaven and can only be entered by clergy of the rank of deacon or above. Here the altar signifies the tomb of Christ. Over the altar rises a structure similar to a baldachin, symbolizing the Ark of the Covenant of Moses or again heaven. In comparison to the rest of the church, the holy of holies is raised on three levels. The baptistery lies to the south of the choir, and the sacristy, where the malka is kept and the sacred bread prepared, lies to the north. To the west of the choir is the nave, where the faithful gather; it symbolizes the earth. While in earlier times the men stood in the front of the nave, which symbolized the



Floorplan of a typical East Syrian church of Mesopotamia.

(After Fiey: Mossoul chrétienne, *1959. Plate II)*

1 *Outer door*
2 *Forecourt, cemetery*
3 *Well*
4 *Beth Slutho*
5 *Baptistery*
6 *Outer door to the baptistery*
7 *Entrance door for men*
8 *Entrance door for women*
9 *Inner door to the baptistery*
10 *Credenzas*
11 *Font*
12 *Window*
13 *Choir*
14 *Altar*
15 *Beth Razzeh*
16 *Sacristy*
17 *Reserve of anointing oil and malka*
18 *Curtain, choir screen*
19 *Side door*
20 *Qostroma, vestibule*
21 *Shqaqona, straight way*
22 *Bema*
23 *Golgotha, credenza*
24 *Reading desks*
25 *Martyrium*
26 *Walled-in relics*
27 *Part of men, sometimes at the right*
28 *Part of women, sometimes at the left*

Garden of Eden, and the women in the rear, which represented the praised Land of Canaan, today both sexes intermingle in the nave. This is in contrast to the Syrian Orthodox, among whom the women gather to the north and the men to the south. Sometimes an iron grille separates the two groups. Holy relics have been placed in the northern wall of the church, and occasionally there is also a *martyrium*, in which lie the bones of martyrs or bishops.

A stone or wooden choir screen, with one to three arches, divides the nave from the choir; it corresponds to the iconostasis of Orthodox churches. A curtain stretched just behind the arches of the choir screen conceals the view of the choir; today the choir screen is rarely seen, but the curtain, as in Syrian Orthodox churches, has remained.[107] During the week the curtain stays closed because the sin of Adam and Eve broke the immediate connection between heaven and earth; it is also closed during the liturgy, when the crucifixion of Christ is being commemorated. Otherwise the curtain is open during the liturgy, as a sign of the presence of Christ, as he had proclaimed, 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I will be there among them' (Matt 18:20). The opening of the curtain is a symbol of the opening of heaven and the arrival of Christ, for the church's liturgy is an earthly representation of the eternal divine liturgy in heaven. Thus, during the worship service the ontological unity of heaven and earth is re-established.

Between the nave and the choir is the

This Gospel lectern, made of stone, stood on the bema and was used during the Liturgy of the Word. The Syriac inscription reads: 'Keep a good memory of the priest Abraham and John and his mother, who donated this.' From the Church of Bennawi near Aleppo, today in the National Museum in Damascus, Syria.[34]

qostroma, which means vestibule. From the perspective of the nave, the qostroma is found on this side of the curtain, but, like the choir, it is raised up in three steps. It represents paradise, the bridge between heaven and earth, which is entered by the readers of Scripture, who symbolize the lower-ranking angels, functioning as heavenly messengers between humanity and God. In earlier times in the centre of the nave there was a rectangular or horseshoe-shaped platform, the *bema*, which symbolized Jerusalem as the centre of Jesus's life.[108] As in the synagogue, readings and the beginning of the worship service – that is, the liturgy of the word – were carried out on the bema. The liturgy of the mysteries, however, took place in the holy of holies. The procession of the celebrating clergy to the bema symbolized the preaching and prophesying of Christ, and their return to the choir, his sacrifice and resurrection. The lay choir who in the case of most sung prayers responded to the angelic choir of the priests and deacons, also took their place on the bema. The bema corresponds to the early medieval ambo, the pulpit jutting out into the nave, which was linked to the choir with a small, slightly raised passageway. In the early Church of the East this passage was called *shqaqona*, the straight way. The shqaqona, which no longer exists, was small, for it symbolized the narrow path leading between the abyss of fleshly sin and the pride of the spirit to the heavenly realm. In the centre of the bema stands a credenza, called *Golgotha*, which represents the tomb of Adam, and beside this is the bishop's throne. The old Nestorian churches had no bell towers, since there were at that time no bells. The faithful were called to worship by someone hitting with a stick one or more wooden planks, called *simandron*, which were hung from ropes.[109]

The Nestorians also called their worship *raze*, the mysteries, since it celebrated the revelation with all its mysteries. It can only be celebrated in a church. The Nestorian rite and the rite of its sister Church, the Chaldean Church, which is united with Rome, are the oldest Oriental rites still in use today. They date in their essence from the fifth century and thus are closest to the Jewish-Christian origins. The worship service consists of three main parts. First the celebrant prepares in the sacristy with a piece of malka, the sacred bread. Then, in earlier days, the mass of the catechumens began, during which the priest and deacons remained on the bema. This liturgy on the bema thus took place in the nave. While the faithful sing psalms and hymns, the altar in the choir is censed – the incense symbolizes both our prayers rising to God and the invisible presence of the Holy Spirit. There follow readings from Holy Scripture, the sermon, litanies and the preparation of the bread. The covering of the wine-filled chalice with a white linen cloth

symbolizes the placing of Christ in the tomb, and its removal the rolling away of the stone that had sealed the tomb's entrance. At this point, in earlier times, those who were not yet baptized were asked to leave the church; today the entire liturgy is celebrated in the qostroma and choir, and the bema no longer exists. Since the words for the departure of the catechumens are still sung today, this break remains.

The liturgy of the holy of holies follows, beginning with the creed. Earlier, the lay choir remained on the bema, the subdeacons processed only to the qostroma and the deacons to the altar, and only the priest or bishop celebrated alone at the altar. This hierarchical advance towards the altar granted the start of the most important part of the liturgy an especially solemn character. The priest is turned towards the altar, not towards the faithful. As *primer inter pares* he leads the prayers of the congregation, and in this way takes on a role similar to that of the imam in Islam. Because today there is no longer a bema, the altar represents not only the tomb of Christ but also Golgotha. The creed is followed by a litany, and then the *anaphora*, the Eucharistic prayer, begins. The Church of the East uses three different but related anaphoras. The first is that of the apostles Addai and Mari, which is used from Easter to Advent. It is followed by the anaphora attributed to Theodore of Mopsuestia, which is used until Palm Sunday. The third Eucharistic prayer, which is said to go back to Nestorius, is used only on special feasts, such as Epiphany.[110] It should be noted here that on 6 January the Church of the East celebrates, as originally, the baptism of Jesus, the Epiphany; the celebration of the appearance of Jesus to the heathen, embodied by the Three Kings, began to supersede the commemoration of the baptism in the Western Churches in the fifth century.[111]

The anaphoras begin with various prayers, which lead to the kiss of peace, which is passed from the priest to the deacons, subdeacons, and then all the faithful. The anamnesis recalls the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ and is followed by the most important part of the Eucharistic prayer. This is the epiclesis, in which God the Father is called upon to send the Holy Spirit to consecrate the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine. A hymn to the honour of God concludes the anaphora. The communion of bread and wine concludes the worship service. It is in keeping with the law of hospitality, so important in the Orient, that after worship the bishop invites to dinner select guests and friends – and, on the occasion of special feasts, the entire congregation. As the author has observed several times, for such meals to have hundreds of participants is not unusual. In this way, the aspects of the sacred and the social shared meal reunite, after having been separated in the second century.

The Church of the East also has a highly symbolic form of the liturgy for the dead. The mass is not celebrated on the day of the burial, which normally occurs on the same day or the day after the death and for which just a prayer is sung in the church. The funeral mass takes place on the third day. As Christ rose on the third day, the deceased, on the third day after his or her death, participates through the Eucharistic celebration in the resurrection of Christ. The extent to which they are marked by a rich and vital symbolism, is always notable in the East Syrian liturgies.

Monasticism and asceticism

The motivation towards ascetic monasticism lay in the ideal of the imitation of Christ and in the necessity, proclaimed by Paul, of conquering the flesh (Rom 8:1–18). Additionally, the rapid growth of the early Christian community diluted the depth of its religiosity, which increased the need for a special way of being Christian. Before

Summer church called Beth Slutho in the Syrian Orthodox Mor Hadbeshabo Church of Ainwardo, Tur Abdin. The summer churches were furnished with stone lecterns, where psalms were sung and masses for the dead were read.[35]

Syrian monasticism began to flourish around the turn from the third to the fourth century, the Essenes and the Encratites had already developed an ascetic, world-renouncing and God-embracing lifestyle. The transition from lay to monastic status was akin to crossing a sharply defined, endlessly deep border, over which there was no return without suffering eternal damnation. Anyone who desired earthly pleasures and left the monastic life was threatened with the fate of Lot's wife: he would be turned into a pillar of salt.[112]

Early Syrian monasticism had an anchoritic character. It was a conscious rejection of the contemporary civilization and its attributes, such as social contact, education, housing, clothing and the use of fire. To paraphrase a counsel of Ephrem, these anchorites not only 'prefer the company of animals to the sight of humans'[113] but also lived like wild animals under the open sky or in mountain caves. Ephrem described their lifestyle: 'Caverns are their palaces, rocks their sleeping rooms, heights their balconies, ledges their habitations; the herb of the mountains is as their dinner table.'[114] These extreme ascetics and penitents called themselves, like the martyrs, 'athletes of the faith' and 'fighters and warriors of Christ', whom they praised as their 'Holy General'.[115]

Beginning around 340, presumably under the influence of Byzantine and Egyptian monks, there emerged in Mesopotamia a concerted effort to return the hermits to the Christian community and integrate them into cenobitic monastic

The famous Nestorian cave monastery of Khinnis in northern Iraq, which was described by Thomas of Marga in 840. Today one may still see 15 cells, which the monks intentionally created out of the stone wall that had been decorated with old Assyrian reliefs and cuneiform texts from the time of King Sennacharib (ruled 705–681BCE). They wanted in this way to reconsecrate the 'heathen' sacred site.[36] The king stands on a winged lion as the second figure from the left.

communities. In the ideal case, hermits were prepared to place their seemingly inexhaustible inner strength in the service of missionary work, to which the rapid expansion of the Church of the East to the east and south attests. While anchoritism was a purely personal matter, cenobitic monasticism is a social institution. This slow reversal is also apparent in the growing criticism of wandering monks and the so-called Messalians. The latter qualified the salvific power of sacraments, meditation and penance, and believed that only continual prayer could defeat the inner demon and thus lead to salvation. The clergy branded them as lazy parasites, who lived only from begging.[116] Monasteries, which were located principally in northern Mesopotamia, were founded on sites associated with the execution of martyrs or the caves of famous hermits, or mountain slopes and earlier pagan shrines were chosen.

The leading lights of Greek-Byzantine and Egyptian cenobitic monasticism condemned Syrian eremitism for both its aims and its practices. While John Chrysostom emphasized that it was not the body that should be fought but rather its harmful desires, Basil the Great (330–379) rejected every expression of extreme self-castigation. Seen from a distance, Syrian anchoritism appears to be, in fact, a mutilation of God's creation – indeed, a blasphemy of the divine work. In light of the alternative between anchoritism and the cenobitic way of life, Basil argued that only the latter could accord with the sacred law of brotherly love; the hermit

loved only himself and disregarded his fellows. St Jerome (342–420) added that the eremitic life led not only to pride and vanity but also to error, since no one is able to be simultaneously student and his own teacher[117] – an insight also emphasized by the Tibetan Buddhist school of Kagyüpa. No one besides Buddha Shakyamuni could be his own spiritual teacher and leader.

For its part, Egyptian monasticism emphasized that the external practices of self-castigation and the infliction of pain mattered less than inner attitude. Asceticism must also be guided by the principle of moderation, since 'everything of excessive measure is of demons'.[118] The father of Egyptian cenobitism, Pachomius (290–346), wrote that only the balanced middle way could distinguish between the 'divine and the demonic asceticism'.[119] The goal of achieving a state equal to that of the angels through extreme, even self-destructive, asceticism is nothing other than a sign of a misguided over-estimation of one's one abilities. In the cenobitic life, by contrast, there was no room for individ-ualistic excesses; common prayer and work took priority. In this regard, a noteworthy tradition tells of a monk called John Colobos, who sought to lead an angelic life and thus rejected all participation in the common life of the monastery. When, after a long fast, he returned hungry from the desert to the monastery, he found the doors closed. To his desperate cry that he was Brother John, he received the reply that Brother John had become an angel and no longer lived among men. Later he was granted entrance, and it was explained to him that he was not an angel but an ordinary man, who, like all other human monks, had to take part in the communal life.[120] Although at first a chasm yawned between the moderate position of Greek-Byzantine monasticism and the extreme Syrian ideal, with regard to both aims and practices, the former had a beneficial and mitigating effect on the latter.

Although a flourishing monastic life rapidly developed within the Church of the East, the turmoil that shook the Church towards the end of the fifth century led to a relaxation of monastic discipline. The study of Scripture was neglected, and monks left monasteries without permission to pursue private interests in the cities, or even took women into their cells. The founder of the Great Monastery on Mount Izla, Abraham of Kashkar (491–586/588), brought an end to these undignified activities with his reforms. The most important of the rules put into place in 571 were the following:

Canon 1: 'Monks live peacefully in their cells and devote themselves to prayer and study or meditation and handicraft. As the fish dies if it is taken from the water, so does the monk who stays outside his cell.'

Canon 4: 'Monks practise silence and gentleness.'

Canon 6: 'No brother may move from monastery to monastery or from place to place or enter the city [Nisibis] except in an emergency and with the permission of the community.'

Canon 10: 'New brothers shall be tested for a given period.'[121]

In 588 Abraham's successor, Abbot Dadisho, added the following rules:

Canon 1: '[He who] does not accept the Orthodox fathers Mar Diodore [of Tarsus], Mar Theodore [of Mopsuestia] and Mar Nestorius shall be unknown to our community.'

Canon 6: 'To travel into the cities or along some pathway is not allowed without the permission of the abbot. He who nonetheless dares to go shall wear sackcloth and stand on ashes for three Sundays. If a monk broke this rule three times, the community discussed his expulsion.' (The once popular wandering life was thus strictly forbidden.)

View looking out from a one-time Nestorian hermit's cell near Challick, northern Iraq.

Canon 7: 'Every brother who comes to the community to stay shall not be accepted unless he can read the Scriptures.'

Canon 17: 'Children shall not be accepted into the community.'

These requirements raised the educational level of the monks and laid the groundwork for the eventual work of translating classical philosophical and scientific texts. Rabban Yussuf Busnaya also emphasized the necessity to begin monastic life with the study of Scripture and the Church Fathers. 'Study is both the way to and the teacher of the next step, solitude in the cell. Without scholarship, there is no complete monastic life.' But study was only the first step. 'In study the individual purifies his bodily senses until they are perfect. In meditative solitude the spiritual person purifies his inner senses, his intellect.'[122]

Canon 13: 'That the brothers shall be tested in the monastery for three years following their arrival. If they behave well, they shall be permitted to build themselves cells. If they behave otherwise, they shall leave in peace.'[123]

This canon is significant, as it makes clear that, among the Nestorians, the cenobitic communal life served merely as preparation and selection process for suitable candidates for the higher eremitic life. Nonetheless, the hermits no longer lived in remote mountains but, rather, in cells or caves near the monastery complex. They remained subject to the authority of their abbot and were required to participate in certain feasts in the monastery church. In the monastery itself lived only the candidates, ailing and incapacitated monks, and those with admini-strative duties. Rabban Yussuf Busnaya instituted another hurdle in the selection process by requiring that novices, before they were admitted to the cenobitic life, had meekly to perform hard physical labour for 50 days. Then he ordered that, when a monk entered the eremitic life, the cell of the new hermit should be closed with a stone in memory of the stone before the tomb of Christ, for the cell was the tomb of the monk with regard to the world.[124] On the other hand, Rabban Yussuf offered one who had completed the three-year novitiate three options, according to his preferences: he could decide on the spiritual eremitic life, be intellectually active as a copyist of manuscripts, translator and preacher, or carry out manual labour in the fields and vineyard and look after the pilgrims in the monastery guest quarters.[125] These three forms of monastic life correspond to the Neo-Platonic view, then current, that the human person consists of corporeal, emotional-intellectual and spiritual dimensions.

Nevertheless, the great Nestorian monasteries were not immune from excesses in the form of vanity, wealth, spiritual sloth, exertion of political influence, or even willingness to use violence – developments seen in monasteries of other confessions and religions as well. So

Four-metre-high remains of the stylite's column in the Syrian Orthodox Monastery of Mor Loozor (Lazarus) in Habsus, Tur Abdin, which was, according to the inscription, erected in 792/793 for the stylite Daniel. Early documents confirm that Nestorian monks also practised this extreme form of asceticism.[37]

Isaac of Antioch warned cenobitic monks of great institutions that they were not to reduce themselves to farmers. He also warned against the fatal involvement in politics and against those abbots who intentionally selected big and strong monks, in order to turn them into gangs of thugs.[126] The distressing events at the Council of Ephesus and the Robber Synod of 449, as well as many other incidents, in which questions of dogma were 'resolved' with fists, demonstrate that brutal and primitive instincts can lurk even under the habit of a monk. The monastic gangs recall the feared *Dob Dob* of Tibetan monasteries, who, as trained fighting monks, attacked other monasteries and even set them on fire. In both cases, the aggression and brutality that presumably feeds and maintains all extreme asceticism is no longer directed inward towards one's own body and its needs but, rather, outward against others who think differently.

If the reports of Bishop Thomas of Marga are given credence, there were also monks who had magical powers. For instance, a certain Mar Maran'anmeh (second half of the eighth century) was said not only to have healed the sick and raised the dead but also, 'at the command of the angel of God', to have destroyed the villages of sinful Christians with earthquakes and conflagrations.[127] This tradition is also very similar to earlier reports from Tibetan monasticism.[128] Another unwholesome development concerned the motivations for founding monasteries. Not only monks called to the spiritual life founded monasteries but also prosperous laypeople, acting for the benefit of their salvation or out of vanity. Since such monasteries were often endowed with large landholdings, they had at their disposal considerable financial means and accordingly accepted many novices. As in ancient Tibet, in certain regions of northern Mesopotamia as many as a quarter of Christian men may have been monks.[129] When a similar development threatened the civil authority in Byzantium, Emperor Nikiphoros Phocas outlawed all new foundations in 964.[130]

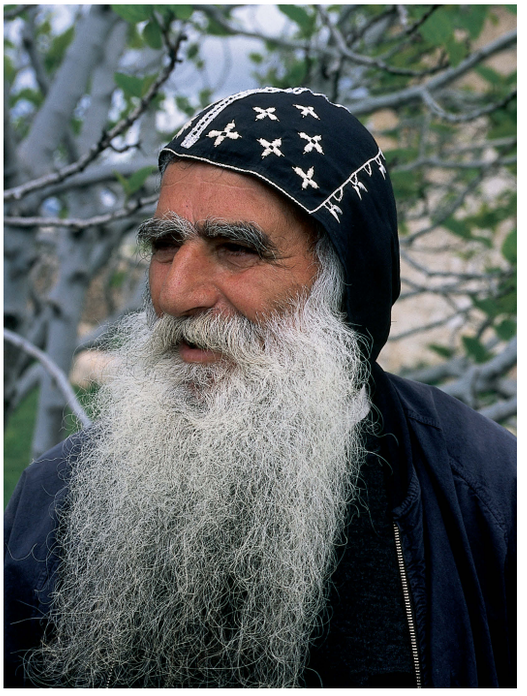
In the region of the Church of the East, however, no imperial permission was needed to limit the number of monks. The continually

advancing Islamization of the land, the seizure of power by the fanatical Turkish Seljuks in the eleventh century and the systematic destruction by the Kurds reduced the number of monasteries in Mesopotamia, with the exception of Tur Abdin, from several hundred to five by 1960 – three Chaldean, one Jacobite and one Syrian Catholic. There are also still a few monastic buildings, which are preserved but no longer have any monks.[131] The last Nestorian monk, Rabban Werda, died before the First World War.[132]

East Syrian mysticism, exemplified by John of Dalyatha

In comparison with the fathers of Syrian mysticism, Aphrahat and Ephrem, mature Nestorian mysticism departed from the ideals of strict asceticism. One branch opted for the path of love mysticism, and its most prominent representative is Isaac of Nineveh; the other followed a spiritual-intellectual path. In this way, knowledge led to an ecstatic vision of the glory of God, in which every distinction between the knower and the known – that is, every duality – was abolished and the soul, in its transfiguration, experienced God – an approach comparable to the Indian way of *Advaita*.

The best-known exponent of this branch is John of Dalyatha, who was born around 690 in Adiabene and died before 786. The writings of John were risky and not uncontroversial; they were condemned on three points at the synod of Patriarch Timothy I in 786/787. First, John was condemned as a modalist, who, with regard to the Trinity, did not acknowledge three hypostases but rather just one, which expressed itself in three different ways. Second, he valued the mystical vision more than prayer; and, third, he made the blasphemous claim of having had a vision of God. No creature could recognize his creator. Timothy's successor, Isho Bar Nun (in office 823–828), rehabilitated the mystic.[133]



The Syrian Orthodox monk Yacub returned from exile to his Monastery of Mor Dimet in Zaz, Tur Abdin, in early 2001, after the last Christians had to leave the village in 1993. His headdress bears 13 crosses; they symbolize Jesus Christ and the twelve apostles. Unlike the Syrian Orthodox Church, the Church of the East has had no monks since the start of the twentieth century.

Like Jerome, John was convinced that an experienced teacher must accompany the mystic on his perilous path, along which lurked demons of madness, arrogance and pride.[134] In describing the mystical process, most Nestorian authors adopted Origen's scheme of the three levels of the human being's relationship to God. The first, physical, level occurs in the form of corporeal asceticism; the second, psychological, as purification of the soul, which then leads to spiritual development, culminating in the vision of Christ as formless light. For John, however, physical purification is not a one-time step but rather, a continual process that ends only with death. In his experience, the purification of the soul is the first step; the enlightenment and blessing of the soul, in which the mystic experiences the revelation of the divine mysteries, the second; and the vision of God, which overcomes all dualism, the third and crowning step.

Despite its strongly fortified walls, the Syrian Orthodox Mor Dimet Monastery in Zaz, Tur Abdin, where the Christian population of the village had sought refuge, also fell to attacking bands of Kurds in 1915.

Bodily and spiritual penance forms 'the gateway to the realm of light that lives within each of us'. However, it not only establishes the original purity of human nature but also grants the necessary zest for God; it is 'the mother of the heavenly eagles who soar to the heavens on wings of flame'.[135] For this reason, John considered the way of the mystic incompatible with the life of a layperson; the true Christian life required the death of earthly passions. From this perspective, those who had not passed through the gate into the monastic life remained 'still among the dead'. Love of God and love of the world were mutually exclusive: 'Christ will enter into your soul and live there if you first empty yourself of all that is worldly.'[136] Corporeal asceticism and fasting should be strict but also moderate, for it is not enough to weaken or even destroy the body; rather, one must tame and purify the passions.

On this point John distinguished himself radically from the ideas of earlier asceticism, since he believed that the purified body could participate in the mystical refreshment of the soul. 'The individual gains union with himself and with the one who unites him. For the powers and sense of the body shall be united with the abilities of the soul and this with the spirit. But the spirit sees in the soul the glory of God.'[137] On Dalyatha's mystical path there sound no discordant notes of the mutilation of the creature but rather the harmony of his holistic purification. John warned, however, that humility and modesty should always accompany the process of purification. 'But to those who deem themselves holy, the Holy One [Christ] says, "You no longer need me, remain there in your holiness."'[138] To encourage humility, John recommended prostration on the ground during prayer – an established practice in Tibetan Buddhism as well. Now the mystic stood on the threshold of the inner vision, the vision of God in the mirror of the soul. 'O Christ, grant that we, through You, might enter the temple of our soul and see You there. O hidden [within us] treasure of life. My brothers, he who has enclosed the view of his spirit within himself will see in the interior of his heart the stars of light shining in ineffable splendour. It will be the vision of the glory of the Eternal One.'[139]

In the second step of the blessing of the soul the mystic experiences, through the grace of God, three degrees of illumination. First, mental illumination in the form of conceptual insights that still have intellectual components. In the next step, there follow contemplations of the divine presence in one's own soul and in all creatures, during which the duality between the knower and the known is not yet resolved. In this moment, deep dismay grips the mystic. Finally, he experiences the divine as pure, formless light, beyond any intellectual perception.

There follow next such states of grace, in which the soul sees itself in its original goodness and simultaneously experiences the presence

Way up to the earlier Nestorian cave monastery of St Qayyoma near Duri, from the ninth century. It was rebuilt in 2000 after being destroyed by Saddam Hussein's Anfal campaign in 1988.

of God. It is the return of the human being to his original goodness. 'When the spirit begins to pray, he sees the radiance of his essence; the beauty of the nature of the soul appears to him. The soul sees itself as it is; it sees the divine light appear and how it is transfigured into its [the light's] likeness. And this likeness is removed from view, and it sees itself as the likeness of God, as it is united with the formless light.'[140] When the individual is entirely with himself, he is entirely with God, and vice versa. The mystic experiences the *unio mystica* not only in his soul but also in all of creation: 'As I [John] thought to have found You [Christ] within myself, I saw that You live in all things.'[141] At this point, all duality between the subject and the object of knowledge is abolished. 'He [Christ] holds me as if without spirit, without existing and without perception. No vision, no hearing, only con-sternation [stupor] and deep silence, without any stirring [of the spirit] and without any consciousness. For in the one who knows, knowledge has forgotten itself, [it is] outside knowing.'[142] It was these descriptions of the vision of God that prompted Patriarch Timothy to condemn John of Dalyatha, since no creature can look upon its creator. The accusation of the patriarch was not entirely accurate, insofar as John clearly distinguished between the nature of God and his glory. 'It is the glory of his nature, not his nature itself, that He reveals to those who love him.'[143]

Rabban Yussuf Busnaya described the *unio mystica* with similar words: 'In the previous state of grace we encountered Christ in our soul and we considered him our Lord and our God. In the final degree we find that the spirit itself becomes Christ; it is no longer servant and Christ is no longer Lord, but rather it [the spirit] becomes Lord and Christ ceases to be Lord. It [the spirit] is no longer human and God no longer God, but rather it becomes God and God is no longer God.'[144]

One can speculate that Nestorian mysticism influenced the later Islamic mysticism of al-Hallaj (858–922). He also questioned the absolute transcendence of God, in that he proclaimed his belief in a union of the human being with God beyond all duality. Like John, al-Hallaj described how, during such an experience, the mystic lost the consciousness of his own identity. Al-Hallaj was crucified in Baghdad in 922 after an eleven-year imprisonment.

Likewise, with regard to the interim state of the soul from the moment of death to the resurrection, John's view differed from the official position. Proceeding from the indivisibility of body and soul and the universal resurrection, the Church of the East likens the state of the soul separated from the body to sleep. Righteous souls enter paradise, and evil souls remain outside, but in both places there is neither blessing nor

punishment. John of Dalytha, by contrast, accepted a partial sleep of the soul: the souls of the unrighteous experience punishment even before Judgement Day, while those of the righteous enjoy states of grace similar to those of mystics, which nevertheless represent but a foretaste of the state of eternal bliss.

Concerning life after death, the Nestorian mystic Isaac of Nineveh (second half of the seventh century) represented a different view. He believed that eternal punishment and damnation of even the worst sinners was irreconcilable with the all-encompassing and unlimited love of God. He considered the concept of original sin blasphemous. Building on Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, Isaac concluded that a loving God did not create rational human beings only later to abandon them to eternal suffering, although he knew before their creation that they would sin and created them anyway. God seeks our well-being and not a pretext for punishing us. For Isaac, hell meant the consciousness that the sinner, out of egoism, was not receptive to God's love. The time in hell, while terrible and agonizing, was nonetheless finite.

Isaac accepted the doctrine of *apokatastasis panton* (Greek for 'the restoration of all'), according to which, in the context of the all-embracing reconciliation of the Creator with his creation, all creation would be restored to its original, perfect state. The most important representative of apokatastasis was Origen (†253); he was vehemently opposed by the father of the doctrine of original sin, Augustine. 'Thanks' to Augustine, Christianity was marked by the frightening model of *original sin-predestination-salvation for the elect and hell for the rest.* But Isaac's vision was entirely different. 'God did not abandon the devil and sinners in the moment of their fall. Demons will not remain demons, nor sinners sinners. For God intends to lead them all to the same state of perfection in which the angels already exist.'[145]

Perhaps a reconsideration of the early East Syrian promoters of an optimistic Christian anthropology, unburdened by original sin, as well as an accessible Christology that inspires the *imitatio Christi*, could help address the current crisis in institutional Christianity. The Church of the East suggests how a Western Church might have appeared without Augustinian pessimism. Isaac's vision was of a religion of love, while that of Augustine was of one of fear.

VII Christians under Islamic Rule

Christians in the Persian Gulf region and in Arabia

Even the earliest Christian sources refer to missionary activity in Arabia. While the Acts of the Apostles (2:11) report that at the Pentecost event the apostles also spoke in Arabic, Church historians such as Eusebius, Rufinus and Theodoret attribute the first missionary work in southern Arabia to the apostle Bartholomew.[1] Given that until the fifth/sixth centuries most Church historians frequently confused the Arabian Peninsula with India or Ethiopia, their statements ought to be accepted only cautiously. Despite this uncertainty, the Christian mission to the Arab region may be divided into three geographic areas: first, in the north, the coastal region of the Persian Gulf; second, the interior region, including the important area of Yemen and the oasis of Najran in the south of today's Saudi Arabia; and, third, the island of Socotra in the Indian Ocean to the south of Yemen. It is one of the fascinating aspects of Oriental Christianity that about 200 years before Mohammed it was able to gain a foothold in the future cradle of Islam and there compete with Judaism. In Arabia today, aside from a few dozen Yemeni Jews, there are no longer Jewish or Christian natives.

As the legend of the founding of the first monastery of al-Hira suggests,[2] the missionary work in Arabia began on the northern coast along the Persian Gulf. Presumably it was first ascetic hermits of the Church of the East who advanced from Basra into Arabia in the fourth century. The first known name is Mar Odisho, who, at the same time as the founding of the monastery of al-Hira towards the end of the fourth century, established a hermitage on the island of Bahrain or the island of Failaka. In

Christian places and monasteries of Arabia.

recent decades, archaeologists have uncovered the ruins of several Nestorian monasteries. Among them on the Persian coast of the gulf are the monastery on the island of Kharg, and on the opposite, Arabian, side the following structures: the monastery of al-Kusur on the Kuwaiti island of Failaka; the Church of Akkaz on the Kuwaiti mainland; a church, several hermitages and cemeteries near al-Jubail and Thaj in modern Saudi Arabia; the monastery on the island of Tarut (Darin) in front of the eastern Saudi coast; the monastery on the peninsula of Qatar; the monastery of Marawah on an island belonging to the emirate of Abu Dhabi; and the great monastery and church of al-Khor on the neighbouring island of Sir Bani Yas. Here the triple-naved church, like the similar churches of Marawah, Kharg and al-Kusur, was decorated with numerous Maltese crosses made of stucco. These monasteries and churches flourished between the fifth/sixth centuries and the seventh/eighth centuries; a few were abandoned, and others, like al-Kusur, were destroyed and used as living quarters. It seems that many Christians were active in trading with pearls, since shah Chosrau I asked Patriarch Ezekiel I (in office 570–582) to investigate the pearl business along the north Arabian Coast. Only the monastery of Kharg was still in operation in the eleventh century.[3] Although ecclesiastical documents refer to bishops in Bahrain and Oman, to date hardly any corresponding archaeological discoveries have been made.

Christian communities existed in several places within the Arabian Peninsula, with those of Najran, Mecca and Yemen ranking as the most significant. From 295 CE the Himyarite dynasty ruled what is today Yemen, which they governed either from the capital of their homeland Zafar, south of Sana'a, or from the capital of the defeated Sabaeans, Marib, which lay east of Sana'a. Their wealth was based on their control of the incense trade route, which linked the incense-producing province of Dhofar with Rome and Iran. However, by the start of the Common Era they had already lost the monopoly on maritime trade with India and the East African coast, when Rome learned the secret of the monsoon winds.

In southern Arabia, until the fourth century CE, a triad of gods enjoyed the greatest veneration: the masculine god of the moon, Almaqah; the feminine goddess of the sun, Dhât-Himyam; and their son Athar, the morning star. Late in the third century a turn towards monotheism began in Marib, as expressed in its earliest stage in the numerous stone inscriptions, written in the Sabaean-Himyaritic script, which call exclusively upon the god Almaqah.[4] In the second stage, after 384, the god called upon remained nameless and was called simply *al-Rahmanan, the Merciful*.[5] The corresponding Arabic word is al-Rahman (الرحمن) and is in the Koran the first attribute of God. The abandonment of the traditional southern Arabian polytheism in favour of a neutral – that is, neither Jewish nor Christian – monotheism, can be explained in part by the political situation. When the Himyarite Empire united all southern Arabia under its rule towards the end of the third century, the need arose for a religion to transcend the tribal structure. While the traditional deities of southern Arabia were connected to individual tribes, monotheism created the possibility of a generally accessible point of contact between people and the only god, beyond tribal affiliations. Insofar as monotheism is, by definition, both personally accessible and universally valid, it has great unitive power as a state religion. At that time, other rulers undertook similar measures: Shapur II declared Zoroastrianism the state religion, and Aurelian (ruled 270–275) tried unsuccessfully to elevate the sun god *Sol Invictus* to universal deity. Constantine then succeeded in his choice of Christianity. The Himyarite kings did not choose Christianity because it would have placed them,

The Awwam Temple, which has existed since around the sixth century BCE and is today called Mahram Bilqis, in Marib, Yemen. The stone inscriptions from the late third century CE found in the gallery of columns no longer invoke the usual divine triad of moon, sun and Venus but exclusively the god Almaqah, which indicates monotheistic tendencies. Photo: 1980.

like Ethiopia, under the influence of Rome, but opted instead for a neutral monotheism, and later Judaism.

A similar, if less clear and later, development emerged in Mecca, the eventual birthplace of the prophet Mohammed, where al-Lah, whose name means *the God*, was worshipped as the highest god. Al-Lah's three daughters – the goddesses Manat, time; al-Lat, the sun; and al-Uzza, the morning star – were very popular, as well. The special status of al-Lah is also made evident by the fact that there was no figure of him in the Ka'aba, although it contained 360 idols. This development recalls the proto-monotheism around the god Marilaha that earlier predominated in the region of Edessa.[6]

We can also find the second Islamic attribute of God in pre-Islamic stone inscriptions in southern Arabia. A Sabaean-Himyarite inscription from Marib, dating to 499 or 505 CE, reports that a house was built with the help of Rahmanan (*rhmnn*), the compassionate (*mthrmn*), with Rahmanan being the name of God and the description *compassionate* his attribute.[7] This double characterization of God corresponds precisely to the one that opens the first sura of the Koran: *In the name of God, the merciful* (*al-Rahman*, الرحمن), the *compassionate* (*al-Rahim*, الرحيم). Thus, Mohammed did not invent the opening formula for each sura but used expressions familiar at that time. In it he united the god al-Lah, widely regarded in the central Arabian Hejaz as the highest god, with Rahmanan, worshipped as the

only god in southern Arabia, with the latter transformed into the first attribute of al-Lah. But the word 'rahmanan' is the southern Arabian equivalent of the Aramaic 'rahmana', which we find in both the Jerusalem and Babylonian versions of the Jewish Talmud and in East Syrian writings such as those of Ephrem.[8] Both terms are still used today in both West Syrian and East Syrian literature.

At that time, both Judaism and Christianity were present in southern Arabia. The first documented Christian missionary activity in southern Arabia goes back to Emperor Constantius II (ruled 337–361), who had the deacon Theophilos, who had been born on the island of Socotra, consecrated as bishop, and sent sometime before 356 as an official envoy to southern Arabia and India. The purpose of the mission was mainly of an economic and political nature, as Theophilos was to establish friendly relations with the states bordering the Indian Ocean, in order to counter Shapur II's policy of expansion and secure the profitable maritime trade with India. This mission was very important for Byzantium because the kingdom of al-Hira, which was a vassal of the Sassanians and bordered on Arabia, controlled the Hejaz to the borders of the Himyarite realm. At the same time, Theophilos, who followed the theology of Arius, was supposed to strengthen diplomatic ties with the ruler of Himyar by having him convert to Christianity and to have churches built for the local Byzantine trading settlements.

It is unclear whether Theophilos ever reached India, but he did meet the Himyarite king Tha'rân Yuhanim and his co-regent and son, Malkîkarib. Despite the opposition of the many Jews who lived at court, he received permission to build three churches in the capital city of Zafar, in Sana'a, and in Aden or Hormuz.[9] However, they were used only by Christian merchants. Whether the bishop actually succeeded in converting the Himyarite king or whether the king accepted Christianity merely as a matter of form, is disputed; in any case, this first missionary effort in southern Arabia produced little lasting success. Malkîkarib's son and successor, Abukarib Asad (ruled c. 385–420), converted to Judaism after visiting the central Arabian oasis city of Yathrib, later called Medina. Yathrib had been founded by Jewish settlers in the pre-Christian period, and its population swelled considerably after Emperor Hadrian's defeat of the second Jewish revolt in 135. Although non-Jewish Arabs also lived in the oasis, Yathrib, which was home to several synagogues, could be considered a Jewish city. After his return to Yemen, King Abukarib ordered the first persecution of Christians. The extent to which the rapid expansion of the Mosaic religion in Himyar pressured and stifled Christianity is evident from King Sharabhi al-Yukkûf's conversion to Judaism around 470, after which he had the Christian missionary Azqir, who had come from Najran, executed because he 'was spreading a new religion'.[10] It appears that Judaism was the leading religion of Himyar from c. 400 to 525. On account of the supremacy of Judaism and the fact that monotheistic inscriptions dating from before the end of the Himyar dynasty in 525 do not mention the Trinity, we conclude that they were of Jewish inspiration.

In the oasis city of Najran, by contrast, a flourishing Christian community emerged in the fifth century. Although Tabari attributed the undated conversion of the Arabs of Najran, who allegedly worshipped a sacred tree, to the Syrian Fimiun (Euphemion),[11] the *Chronicle of Seert* is more informative. It reports that, at the time of the Sassanian shah Yazdgerd I (ruled 399–420), a merchant from Najran named Hannan, returning from a business trip to Constantinople, stopped in al-Hira and there learned of East Syrian Christianity. Upon his return to Najran he baptized his family and many other occupants of his house, and even made a missionary journey

Southern sluice of the coffer-dam of Marib, built in the sixth century BCE. An inscription on a stele from 542CE reports in the name of the Trinity about the repair of the coffer-dam and the construction or renovation of a church.[38] *Photo: 1993.*

to Himyar.[12] Although the first Christian community of Najran was most likely Nestorian, Justin's persecution of Miaphysites beginning in 519 resulted in a significant movement of refugees to Najran. Najran became a Christian city of Arabia with several magnificent churches.

In 521, in the person of the Jew Yusuf as'ar Yath'ar (called Masruq in Syriac and Dhu-Nuwas in Arabic, meaning the *curly-haired one*) the royal throne of the Himyars was occupied by a man who wanted the kingdom of Israel to rise again in Arabia. The conflict between the two monotheistic religions was foreordained when Dhu-Nuwas led the rapidly erupting conflict as a religious war. At the beginning of 522 he attacked the Christians of his realm, to which Najran belonged as a semi-autonomous region. At the same time, he had the Byzantine traders, who travelled from Himyar to Ethiopia, plundered and murdered, provoking the first military intervention by the Christian Ethiopians. Although the king had to leave Zafar, he mounted a successful counter-attack in the cold of winter. He returned to his capital, burned the church in which the Christians were imprisoned, and likewise destroyed the Church of Mocha on the Red Sea.

He then led his army northwards and laid siege to Christian Najran in 523 or 524. Although he granted the Christians safe passage after their capitulation, Dhu-Nuwas instigated a terrible bloodbath. He ordered all the clergy, nuns and monks to be burned alive in the cathedral; the leading citizens and merchants, as well as their

families, were beheaded. That the king acted so cruelly out of religious motives is evident from the fact that he promised the Christians their lives if they would accept his religion: 'Now you [the wives of the beheaded civic leaders] have seen how your husbands were killed because they said that Christ is God and the Son of God. Deny Christ and the cross! Become Jews like us.'[13] As another of Dhu-Nuwas's statements makes clear, he persecuted primarily the Miaphysites because they believed in the single divine nature of Christ: 'Are you somehow cleverer than these Greeks who live among you and call themselves Nestorians?'[14] But the Christians remained steadfast, and some 4700 martyrs met with death; 1300 children were sold as slaves.[15] Immediately after the massacre, Dhu-Nuwas addressed two letters to the Persian shah and the king of Hira, Mundir III, in which he demanded that they follow his example and destroy the Christians. But Mundir, whose wife was Nestorian, did not consider this and, in fact, informed a Byzantine delegation staying at his court about the incident.

Christianity becomes the state religion in southern Arabia

But Dhu-Nuwas underestimated the Miaphysite negus of Ethiopia, who burned to avenge the massacre of his garrison of Zafar and his Christian brothers in Najran. Around 525 he landed on the west coast of Yemen with a powerful army, killed Dhu-Nuwas, and imposed Christianity on many Jews,[16] after which he placed in power a Himyarite viceroy. After a few years of turmoil, the Miaphysite Ethiopian Abraha seized power around 533, which made Christianity the state religion of southern Arabia for 40 years. The final repair of the great dam of Marib, constructed in the sixth century BCE, took place during Abraha's reign. A stele dated to the year 542 reports not only about the construction or renewal of the Church of Marib but also about the complete repair of the dam, which presumably had been severely damaged by an earthquake. It begins with an appeal to the Trinity: 'Through the power, the glory and the grace of the merciful [al-Rahmanan], his Messiah and the Holy Spirit.'[17] But 30 years later the dam finally collapsed; the once fertile region of Marib lost its lifeline and became a barren desert.[18] The final destruction of the dam of Marib must have made a significant impression on the people, since one or two generations later the Koran referred to it in words similar to those describing the great flood: 'But they [the inhabitants of Marib] turned away; then we sent a raging flood against them' (34:16).

Abraha used his authority to promote Christianity in southern Arabia and had many churches built or rebuilt. The most magnificent church was the Cathedral of Sana'a, which was adorned with murals and mosaics.[19] The Muslim historian Tabari reported that in building the cathedral Abraha wanted to supplant the central Arabian trading centre of Mecca as a pilgrimage site, as the Ka'ba was, even in the pre-Islamic period, the most important religious focal point of Arabia. Now the Bedouins were supposed to make an annual pilgrimage to Sana'a rather than Mecca. But the Quraysh, the ruling tribe in Mecca, murdered Abraha's envoys and engaged a Bedouin to desecrate the cathedral of Sana'a. He is said to have smeared the altar and the cross with faeces in the middle of the night.[20] Abraha swore revenge and decided to destroy the Ka'ba. Although Abraha's army, which had war elephants at its disposal, was far superior to Mecca's, and on the march to Mecca – around 552[21] – it won the first skirmish, it met with an ambush in a narrow valley shortly before reaching its goal and was destroyed. Interestingly, the heroic leader of the Meccans, Sheik Abd al-Muttalib, was none other than Mohammed's grandfather, with whom the future prophet lived until he was

eight years old. One can speculate that family pride in the destruction of the Christian army inspired Mohammed, when he felt the call to lead the Arabs away from polytheism, to choose not Christian monotheism but, rather, worship of the highest god of the Ka'aba, al-Lah. Certainly, the national desire to free Arabia from the foreign rule of Ethiopia and Iran constituted a further motivation for the revelation of a new religion.

The defeated king Abraha was followed by two of his sons; but around 570 Jewish descendants of Dhu-Nuwas dared to mount an uprising and asked the Sassanian king Chosrau I for military aid. An Iranian army landed in Aden and conquered the weakened Christians. However, instead of allowing the revival of the ancient kingdom of Himyar, the Sassanians made Yemen an Iranian province, where they remained until their expulsion by the Arabs of Mohammed around 630. Presumably the Church of the East used this new conquest to strengthen its presence in southern Arabia. Known by name is the prominent central Arabian tribe of Kinda, which was in part Nestorian.[22] There were also a few Christians among the Quraysh, the leading tribe of Mecca. The most famous of these was the scholar and fortune-teller Waraqa ibn Naufal, who was related to Mohammed as the cousin of the prophet's first wife, Khadija.[23] Apparently at that time there was said to be a picture of Mary with Jesus on the wall of the Ka'aba.[24] For its part, Abraha's renowned cathedral of Sana'a remained standing until about 770, when the Arab administrators of Yemen ordered its destruction. Its capitals, decorated with Greek crosses, were reused in the construction of the great mosque.[25] The last Nestorian bishop of Yemen with his see in Sana'a, Thomas al-Margarri, served until 850; the Christians there were mentioned for the final time in 911.[26]

As the traveller to India Cosmas Indicopleustes noted around 525, the diocese on the island of Socotra was the third Nestorian stronghold in the Arabian realm. It stood under the authority of the metropolitan see of Rew Ardashir.[27] On account of its geographical isolation, Christianity held its own for centuries after the conquests of Islam. Marco Polo, who visited the island on his return journey around 1293/1294, reported, 'The people [of the island] are all baptized, they have an archbishop. The archbishop has nothing to do with the pope in Rome, but is subject to the great archbishop of Baghdad.'[28] In the sixteenth century Christianity became blended with Islam and a moon cult; it died out in the early twentieth century. Earlier, around 1800, fanatical Wahabis, the Muslim state sect of Saudi Arabia, had landed on the island and destroyed all the Christian houses of worship.[29] Archaeological ruins of a church recall the one-time presence of Nestorian Christians.[30]

In light of the impressive spread of Christianity in Arabia, it is surprising that there are hardly any hints of a pre-Islamic translation of Holy Scripture into Arabic. The oldest fragments, from the eighth and ninth centuries, come from Palestine and the Sinai.[31] First the Nestorian philosopher Hunayn Ibn Ishaq (808–873) translated the Septuagint,[32] approximately contemporary are the earliest translations of the Peshitta and the letters of Paul.[33] We can only speculate about the reasons for these relatively late translations. Was only Syriac used as a liturgical language at that time? Were most Arab Christians, because of their nomadic lifestyle, illiterate? This reason may have applied in the northern Arabian region and in Yemen, but hardly in Najran. Or have older translations simply vanished without a trace?

The loss of the Arabian dioceses

On account of Islam's link with the burgeoning Arab nationalism there arose deep in the desert of Arabia a whirlwind of such power that, in a matter of decades, it destroyed the Sassanian

Empire, conquered more than half of the Byzantine Empire and for the first time not only stopped the spread of Christianity but, over time, forced it out of its own birthplace. From the perspective of the early twenty-first century, the Islamic conquest meant the beginning of the decline of Syrian Oriental Christianity, as both the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Church of the East are threatened with extinction in their lands of birth.

The proclamation of the prophet Mohammed (570–632) occurred not in a purely 'pagan' environment, since all Arabian cities possessed Jewish and Christian communities of varying size. In addition to the adherents of these two monotheistic religions, there were in Mecca also independent monotheists, called *Hanife*, who had rejected the worship of the numerous tribal deities and acknowledged only al-Lah as the true God, but were nevertheless neither Christians nor Jews. Mohammed, who was familiar with both religions, latched on to this point. First, he elevated the highest god of Mecca, al-Lah, to the only God, Allah, who tolerated no other gods. Then, following the prophets who preceded him, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, he emphasized that he taught no new religion but, rather, was re-establishing the aniconic worship of the God of Abraham in its original purity. Since God is neither visible nor imaginable, he should not be worshipped with sacrifices and idols but instead with prayer and the proclaiming of his message. Mohammed wanted to cleanse the Ka'aba – whose founding he attributed to Abraham, father of the forefather of all Arabs, Ishmael – of its 360 idols and consecrate it to Allah alone. In this regard, Mohammed was of a similar spirit to Jesus when he purified the Temple (Matt 21:12 ff.). Since the Ka'aba was simultaneously a religious and an economic centre, the authorities of Mecca feared that Mohammed's radical initiative could lessen its attractiveness and undermine its role as a trading hub. In 622 Mohammed fled to Jewish Yathrib.

There he organized his followers into a socio-religious community under his leadership. This concept of a faith community gathered around a single god, without ties to any tribe, enabled Mohammed to overcome the intra-Arab contradictions between settled peoples and nomads, as well as between tribes. In the following years Mohammed extended his power over all of Yathrib, neither shying away from attacking trade caravans from Mecca nor tolerating opposition from other religions. He expelled the Jewish tribe of Banu Qaynuqa from their own city, and he had the leaders of the likewise Jewish Qurayzah executed. Shortly after his death, central Arabia was purged of Jews and Christians. In contrast to Jesus, Zarathustra and Mani, Mohammed was not only the founder of a religion; he was also simultaneously a warrior and a successful statesman. It was precisely this combination of various roles that made Islam suspect to Jews and Christians, since a religious message should succeed on the strength of its truth and with words, not with the sword. In this spirit, a Jew of Palestine stated around 636, 'Mohammed is a false prophet. Do prophets appear armed from head to toe?'[34] In 691 the Nestorian patriarch Henanisho I (in office 685–701) responded similarly when Caliph Abd al-Malik asked him what he thought of Islam. The fearless patriarch answered, 'It is a power that was established by the sword and not a faith confirmed by divine miracles, like Christianity and like the old law of Moses.' At first the caliph wanted to cut out the tongue of the courageous patriarch, but then he pardoned Henanisho, on the condition that he never again appear before him.[35]

Although Mohammed proclaimed a universal religion, he remained trapped in the fundamentals of Hebraic thought. Allah, like the God of Moses, is a righteous, punitive God, who shows mercy only to repentant sinners. Most of the suras expand on the Old Testament idea that God warns his people against disobedience and

The Mosque of Nabi Yunus, which is oriented towards the east, in Mosul, northern Iraq (where the grave of the prophet Jonah is said to be found), was built over the grave of the Nestorian patriarch Henanisho I (in office 685–701). The Christian monastery, founded at the end of the fourth century, was converted into a mosque in the tenth century. In 1349 there was discovered the allegedly uncorrupted body of the patriarch, who had died more than six centuries earlier, which was identified with the prophet Jonah, associated with Nineveh/Mosul.[39] The 'Islamic State' destroyed the mosque and the tomb on 24 July 2014 with explosives.

threatens them with severe punishment. At the same time, divine goodwill correlates with the material success of the faithful – likewise an Old Testament principle, which the spirit of the New Testament diametrically opposes. Besides the refusal of the Arab Jews to recognize Mohammed as prophet, it can presumably also be attributed to the internal resemblance of Islam to the Hebraic religion that the Koran is generally more hostile towards Jews than towards Christians. 'Among all people, the Jews and the idol worshippers [are] the worst foes of the faithful. And those who say: "We are Christians" are most well disposed towards the faithful' (5:85). Another sura, however, condemns Christians and Jews with equal severity because they did not believe Mohammed's revelation: 'When a book from Allah [the Koran] came to them [Christians and Jews], they rejected it. Allah's curse be upon the infidels!' (2:89).

In 630 Mohammed occupied Mecca without a struggle, and there he received many delegations from Arab, including Christian, tribes, who recognized his rule. His successor Abu Bakr (ruled 632–634) explicitly declared Mohammed the final prophet of God, and determined that leaving the Muslim community represented treason against God and that apostasy, as had already been ordered by the Koran, must be punished by death.[36] On this point Islam resembled Zoroastrianism. Islamic tolerance limited itself – and still limits itself today in such countries as Iran and Saudi Arabia – to granting Jews and Christians the options of

practising the religion in which they were born or becoming Muslims. Anyone who leaves Islam deserves death.

Among the Christians who rendered homage to Mohammed were not only the Nestorian patriarch Ishoyahb II but also the Christians of Najran, who sent a delegation to Mecca in 631. They subjugated themselves and offered to provide troops in the event of war. Mohammed accepted the subjugation; he imposed two payments of tribute upon them and obliged them to provide military aid. In return he guaranteed the Christians personal security and freedom of worship, as well as protection of the clergy, churches and Church holdings.[37] Other Christian tribes, however, such as the Abd al-Qaïs, converted to Islam.[38]

But the prophet tolerated only Christians and Jews, who belonged to the *Peoples of the Book* – that is, they relied on a revelation of God made through prophets. After the conquest of Iran, the Zoroastrians were likewise considered a People of the Book, for practical reasons.[39] Regarding other religious communities, however, Mohammed was unyielding, and for them there was but one choice: Islam or death. As Allah had revealed to his prophet around 630, 'And when the forbidden months [a four-month transitional period] are over, then kill the idol worshippers, wherever you meet them. But if they repent and pray and pay the zakat [the tax incumbent on all Muslims], then the way is open to them.'[40] The first victims of the merciless policy were the Arab polytheists, and later the Buddhists of central Asia and, at times, the Manichaeans.

The prophet himself ended this initial tolerance towards Christians, however, when, on his deathbed in 632, he recommended that Islam be used specifically for the building up of the Arab nation and that 'all the infidels be driven from the Arabian Peninsula'.[41] Islam was to become the national religion of all Arabs, and Arabia a cosmic mosque, open only to Muslims. Three years later, Caliph Omar (ruled 634–644) put Mohammed's wish into action and revoked the pact of Mohammed with the Christians of Najran, whom he had deported mostly to al-Hira, as well as to Syria and Basra. They were, however, permitted to maintain their religion. Towards the end of the eighth century the Miaphysites who had settled in al-Hira were converted by Patriarch Timothy I to the Church of the East, while those in Basra soon converted to Islam, in order to avoid the special tax imposed on Christians.[42] After less than a century by Muslim reckoning – that is, beginning in the year 622 CE – Arabia had been practically purged of Christians and Jews; small Christian communities continued to exist until the tenth century only along the northern border and in Yemen. When the Arabs advanced to the north as of 632, Syrian and Iraqi Arab Christians also came under great pressure to accept Islam; the remaining Christians were left undisturbed for the moment. A famous exception was the powerful Nestorian tribe of the Arab Taghlib, who refused to betray their faith and were

Jonah is the prophet of Nineveh, which lies in the north-west of the city of Mosul, Iraq. The Bible recounts that God ordered Jonah to travel to Nineveh and threaten the inhabitants with divine judgement. When Jonah fled from God by sea, his ship got into distress, whereupon the crew threw him into the water. However, God sent a whale that swallowed him and spat him up onto the land three days later. Jonah now obeyed and went to Nineveh, where the people repented of their sins and were thus spared by God. Since the Koran adopted this story, it is understandable that both Christians and Muslims honour Jonah.[40] (From the manuscript History of the World by Rashid ad-Din, in Tabriz, north-western Iran, written in 1306/1307. Edinburgh University Library. Or Ms 20f 23v.)

even prepared to pay twice the normal tax on Christians. Several Taghlib leaders paid for their steadfastness with death.[43]

Between tolerance and oppression – Christians as second-class citizens

The Arabs made up a small minority in the conquered regions and at first withdrew to military encampments. Upon the death of the fourth caliph, Ali (ruled 656–661), General Mu'awiya I (ruled 661–680) seized power, founded the Umayyad dynasty and moved the Islamic capital from Medina to Damascus in the heart of a purely Christian land. For practical and financial reasons, the Umayyads refrained from violently converting non-Arab Christians to Islam. In regions that had previously belonged to Byzantium they often left the Christian administration in office under their command, and in the former Sassanian Empire opportunities for Christians, especially Nestorians, arose in civil government, which had earlier been closed to them. The Miaphysites also benefited from the change in power, since it freed them from the persecutions of the Byzantine authorities.

On both sides of the Euphrates, Christians either accepted the Arabs with neutral goodwill or celebrated them as liberators from the Byzantine or Sassanian yoke. As most of the cities surrendered without opposition, religious authorities, such as patriarchs and bishops, negotiated treaties with the Arabs regulating their status. They were all similar and subsumed under the title the *Covenant of Omar*. Others were said to be traceable to Caliph Ali, highly esteemed by the Shi'ites, or even to the prophet himself. Although the documents extant today date back to a later period, they reflect well the Arab strategy of the time towards their subjects of other religions. Even today, Church communities treasure such documents, since they attest with the highest authority to their rights. A few of the agreements favourable to the Christians are obvious forgeries, of which the Nestorians, most deeply affected by Islam, were masters. Although sometimes these agreements were not forcefully applied or were made more stringent, their basic structure remained consistent. They defined the status of a church, its rights and duties, and the official limitations upon it.

The prerequisite for these pacts was the organization of the Church of the East, dating from the Sassanian period, into a *millet*. This political structure was defined by neither territorial nor linguistic criteria but rather by a common creed. Since in the Islamic state the civil law follows immediately from the religious commandments, it cannot apply in its entirety to those of other faiths. Thus, a millet functions like a theocracy: all the faithful are under the

Bosom of Abraham. Mural in the Monastery of Mar Musa, Syria, twelfth century. The three figures to the front in the bosom of Abraham may also be understood as symbols of the three related religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

jurisdiction of their patriarch, who collects taxes from the civic leaders and bankers of his community on behalf of the Islamic authorities. Since this small, privileged class managed immense sums of money during the first two centuries of Abbasid rule, many opportunities arose for personal enrichment, including, for instance, the leasing of taxes or the sale of high religious offices – i.e. simony.

In this ecclesiastical state, the Nestorian patriarch enjoyed wide-ranging authority until the eleventh/twelfth centuries, as he personally ruled on juridical conflicts within his community and could leave the civil authorities to carry out his judgements.[44] Only juristic matters that also concerned Muslims automatically came before a Muslim court, where the testimony of a Christian carried less weight than that of a Muslim, while the punishment of Christians was harsher. In the case of murder, the degree of punishment hinged on the religious affiliation of both perpetrator and victim. If a Muslim killed a Christian, the blood money was only half that paid for a Muslim victim. But, if a Christian killed a Muslim, a death sentence necessarily awaited him. On the other hand, the patriarch was legally responsible for both the good conduct and loyalty of his co-religionists, as well as the demanded volume of taxes. And so the Nestorians constituted a numerically strong but politically weak vassal state.

The overthrow of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) by the Abbasids (750–1258) benefited the Nestorians because the new ruler transferred the seat of government of the Islamic empire from Damascus to Iraq, and in 762 founded the new capital of Baghdad to the north of Seleucia-Ctesiphon on the site of a Nestorian village.[45] The Church of the East had two other advantages over other Churches as well. First, of all the Christologies, the Nestorian most closely resembled the Islamic interpretation of Jesus, since it emphasized Christ's humanity and did not call Mary God-bearer. Second, the Church of the East had for centuries been hierarchically independent of the arch-enemy Byzantium. For this reason, Patriarch Timothy maintained authority over *all* Christians living within the Abbasid caliphate, which Caliph al-Kaim confirmed for Patriarch Abdisho II (ruled 1074–1090).[46] The disadvantage of this far-reaching official authorization was that each patriarchal election required the confirmation of the caliph. The Nestorian patriarch was, on the one hand, the theocratic head of all Christians of the caliphate, which extended from Cairo to Samarqand, and thus one of the most powerful vassals. On the other hand, he was in the end a public servant, whom the caliph could depose.

The authorization by Caliph Muktafi II (ruled 1136–1160) of Patriarch Abdisho III (in office 1138–1148), dating from 1138, reads: 'The charter of the highest imamate of Islam is hereby granted to you to be the Catholicos of the Nestorian Christians inhabiting the City of Peace [Baghdad] and all the lands of the countries of Islam. You are empowered to act as their head and the head also of the Greeks [Byzantines], Jacobites and Melkites. If any of the above-mentioned clerics [from the Churches named] treads in the path of revolt against your orders or refuses to accept your decisions, he will be prosecuted and punished. Your life and property, as well as that of your people, will be protected, likewise your churches and monasteries. We will be satisfied with your payment of the capitation tax. Be worthy of all these favours and set up prayers and invocations for the Commander of the Faithful.'[47] Finally, only the Nestorian patriarch enjoyed the privilege of permission to live in the capital.

The civil regulation of the status of Christians and Jews was laid out in principle in the Koran in sura 9:29, upon which also rests the Islamic justification for war: 'Fight against those of the Peoples of the Book who do not believe in Allah

Serjilla, one of the 300 Dead Cities of northern Syria. The Arab conquest led to the sudden breakdown of trade with Byzantium, the economic collapse of the rich agrarian region and emigration from rural areas.

and the Last Judgement, and do not regard as impermissible that which Allah and his prophet have declared impermissible, and do not follow the true creed until they pay tribute of their own free will and acknowledge their subjugation.' This revelation of Allah divides the world into the so-called *Dar al-Islam*, the abode of peace, and the *Dar al-Harb*, the abode of war. In the former region, Islam rules, but in the latter, war, since Islam has not yet been accepted there. Non-Islamic states and societies are fundamentally aims of war, which will be fought as long as they must, until their inhabitants either convert to Islam or subjugate themselves and pay tribute to the Islamic community. From an economic perspective, the demand for the payment of tribute was the motivating force behind Allah's call for war (Sura 2:216). As soon as Christians, Jews or Zoroastrians were willing to surrender and pay tribute, the war ended, and the relevant civil rights came into effect.

Christians had the social rank of protected clients, called *zimmi*, and the state guaranteed the security of their persons, houses and fields, as well as their movable property. They could practise their religion within their community (but not publicly), baptize their own children, marry and bury according to their customs, bequeath their property and keep most of their churches. They were released from military service and thus excluded from the then lucrative service in the officer corps. For this protection, Christians had to pay a special poll tax, depending upon their profession, and a property tax.[48] To these were added a tribute in kind from the harvest, as well as additional taxes for the benefit of the Muslim community and support of the tax collectors.[49] In rural areas, zimmi who owed taxes but were unable to pay had their children taken and sold as slaves.[50] The higher the tax burden became, the greater was the financial incentive to convert to Islam. In order to forestall the danger of a large fall in tax revenues, Iraq's Umayyad governor al-Hajjaj (in office 694–714) waived the property tax only for Arab Muslims and not for converts or their descendants.[51] Thus

Mausoleum of John the Baptist in the Umayyad mosque of Damascus, Syria. Originally there stood here a Roman temple dedicated to Jupiter, which Emperor Theodosius I (ruled 379–395) had converted into the Church of St John at the end of the fourth century. This was changed into a mosque in 705–725 and rebuilt from the ground up in 1893 after a fire. According to popular Islamic religious, eschatological ideas, the victorious Jesus will appear at the Last Judgement on the eastern minaret, the Jesus Minaret, of the Umayyad mosque and kill the Antichrist.[41]

there emerged a society made up of three classes: Muslims of Arab descent; non-Arab Muslims, called *mawali*; and non-Arab Peoples of the Book. It was discrim-ination against the mawali that triggered the Abbasid revolution in 750 and transformed the Arab empire into an Islamic empire.

In certain parts of the Dar al-Islam, the combination of a weak central authority and a careless exploitation of the non-Muslim, rural population by arbitrary taxation and bands of nomadic robbers led to an irreversible collapse of rural agrarian regions. The impoverished and highly indebted farmers abandoned their fields and olive groves, which the Bedouins who took them over left fallow, leading to the decline of agriculture, to depopulation and, finally, to the desertification of entire provinces. In the case of Syria and Palestine the once flourishing trade with the Christian states of the Mediterranean also came to a standstill, depriving the cities of their economic base. And so agricultural regions in Syria, Palestine and Iraq became pastureland, and the famous 'Dead Cities' appeared in northern Syria, where sheep and goats graze among the ruins and churches are used as stables.

Along with the basic fiscal regulations, there were a series of restrictions, concerning public life in particular. First, numerous cathedrals and churches were converted into mosques, as the basic structure of the great mosques of Damascus, Aleppo, Diyarbakir and Mosul attests, or new mosques were built from the materials of destroyed churches. Second, the conversion of

Muslims was strictly forbidden, likewise apostasy from Islam. Still today, in some Islamic countries such acts are considered capital crimes, punishable by death. Additionally, no Christian man was permitted to marry a Muslim woman; the reverse case was allowed, as long as the children were Muslim. No Christian could be prevented by his or her relatives from converting to Islam.

The following types of conduct were also forbidden or imposed upon Christians. Every Muslim is to be granted three days' shelter and care in the churches (!) free of charge. No new churches, monasteries or hermitages may be built, and their renovation or repair is also forbidden.[52] Processions outside the church and the public display of the cross, images and figures are forbidden, likewise the reading of the Koran. Every act of worship, including funerals, must be quiet, and the simandron may only be struck quietly within the church. Christians may not gather in a quarter inhabited by Muslims, and when encountering a Muslim in the street must stop respectfully. No Christian house may be taller than neighbouring Muslim houses. Christians may not carry swords or ride horses, but only asses and mules; the use of saddles is either generally forbidden or permitted only in the case of wooden saddles. They may not walk down the middle of the street but only to the sides. It is forbidden for Christians to give their children typically Muslim names and sometimes even to use the Arabic script.[53] It is forbidden for Christians to clothe themselves like Muslims; they must wear a distinguishing belt and shave the front portion of their heads. Clothing worn in public must be marked front and back with a yellow piece of cloth. Anyone who disregards these laws will be killed or his family will be sold into slavery or he will become a Muslim.[54]

After the Umayyad governor al-Hajjaj (in office 694–714) and Caliph Omar II (ruled 717–720) first fully imposed these discriminatory measures and increased the financial pressure on the Christians, the situation eased for the Christians until the third Abbasid caliph, al-Mahdi (ruled 775–785), who placed new emphasis on the discriminatory measures following a few military defeats by Byzantium. Then in 850 Caliph Mutawakkil (ruled 847–861) intensified them still further, not least in order to break the increasing social influence of the Nestorians. Christians now had to wear yellow coats and mark their head coverings with two special buttons. Women also had to conceal their faces with yellow veils. They were not permitted in the market on Friday, and their children were not allowed to learn Arabic in school. All Christian and Jewish civil servants, even if they were merely scribes, had to accept Islam, or they would be released. Furthermore, 'wooden figures depicting the devil had to be placed on the doors of their houses'. Finally, Christians had to make the graves of their dead level with the ground.[55] In light of the rules governing the clothing of Christians in public, one cannot escape the conclusion that the tragic Jewish star did not originate in Europe but, rather, in the Islamic caliphate of the Abbasids.[56] Mutawakkil's regulations brought an end to the first period of flourishing for the Church of the East, which lasted from c. 780 to 847. Although these measures were not always and everywhere enforced to the same degree, there is no doubt that the Christians lived in a social ghetto. With the exception of doctors, scholars and translators, the Nestorians were excluded from political, military and socially relevant life. It is worth considering that some of these discriminatory policies against those of other religions remain in effect even in the twenty-first century in a few Middle Eastern countries.

In a certain sense, the Arab conquest of the Middle East gave the Church of the East an advantage, since it paved the way for Nestorian monks and missionaries to return to the former Byzantine regions west of the Euphrates.

Nestorian dioceses were established in Damascus, Aleppo, Edessa, Mopsuestia, Tarsus, Melitane, Jerusalem, Cairo and Alexandria, and on Cyprus; Damascus, Jerusalem, Cairo and Alexandria were later elevated to metropolitan sees. Nestorian monks could now visit the Coptic monks of Egypt without hindrance and found several monasteries in Palestine.[57] Under the Fatimid Shi'ite caliph al-Aziz (ruled 975–996), who ruled over Palestine, Egypt and North Africa, a Nestorian served as vizier, who in this capacity administered the entire realm. His name, Isa Ibn-Nastur, means literally 'Jesus, son of Nestorius'.[58] The caliph's death brought to an end a two-decade period of great tolerance, which had enabled the Nestorians to build numerous new churches. Like the Nestorian catholicoi, Isa Ibn-Nastur also emphasized the great distance of the Church of the East from the Roman-Byzantine Church and suggested its purported closeness to Islam.[59] Al-Aziz's son and successor, al-Hakim (ruled 996–1021), however, distinguished himself through unbounded fanaticism. He had Isa Ibn-Nastur murdered in 1002 and mercilessly persecuted the Christians. Both the twelfth-century Nestorian historian Mari ibn Suleiman and Bar Hebraeus reported, 'The Christians of Egypt and Syria [Palestine] were persecuted; they had to wear a wooden cross of five pounds weight around their necks, and a large number became Muslims.'[60] When al-Hakim declared himself the incarnation of God, he was murdered. Both the Sunnis and the Shi'ites consider him a deranged blasphemer; the Druzes, however, who live in Lebanon and Syria, regard him as their 'hidden' imam.

Over the short and middle term, the shift in power from the Sassanians to the Muslims had a positive effect on the Church of the East. Although under the Christian-hater al-Hajjaj and under the caliphs Umar II, al-Mansur, al-Mahdi and Harun al-Rashid isolated incidents of interference occurred and some churches were destroyed, the Nestorians suffered no further out-and-out persecutions, 'merely' social discrimination. There were hardly any official efforts to force conversion. While the Umayyad Empire was characterized by the Arabs and an Arab spirit, the early Abbasids were much more internationally oriented, which benefited educated Christians. Individual doctors, scholars, poets, translators and merchants even achieved great respect and wealth. On the other hand, the Church was, as before, strictly forbidden from undertaking missionary efforts among adherents of the state religion. The potential for growth in the Abbasid Empire was much smaller than under the Sassanians, since there were no longer any polytheists to convert. Additionally, the Sassanians had on occasion tacitly tolerated the conversion to Christianity of simple people such as farmers and artisans, while the Islamic authorities consistently punished every instance of apostasy. This strict forbidding of missionary activity was not the least motivation for the Nestorians to send missionaries to the Far East.

The long-term prospects of the Nestorians, however, were gloomy, for four reasons. First, financial and social incentives tempted Christians to convert to Islam. Second, conversion to Islam, which shared the Hebraic heritage with Christianity and acknowledged Jesus as a prophet, was infinitely easier than the earlier conversion to Zoroastrianism. One also ought not overlook the fact that, upon the initial confrontation with Islam, not a few Christians questioned whether it represented another heretical Christian (or Jewish) sect or if Mohammed might not really be the promised paraclete.[61] Only the consistent rejection of the Eucharist, the cross and religious images convinced them otherwise. Third, Islam is a down-to-earth religion with a simple, comprehensible creed. It has no hard-to-grasp concepts but, rather, limits itself to placing achievable demands for conduct on its adherents. Fourth,

the churches remained at the mercy of the ruler of the moment, and the Christians helpless against the greedy tax collectors.

The heyday of the Church of the East under Patriarch Timothy I

The process of changing power from the Sassanians to the Arabs lasted for more than a century and brought difficulties to the Church of the East. Seleucia-Ctesiphon fell in 637, but the province of Fars not until 649, which caused the patriarch, which lived in modern Iraq, to lose contact with and control over the dioceses of southern Iran, who traditionally sought independence. In fact, after the re-establishment of imperial unity, the metropolitan of Rew Ardashir, Shimun and his 18 bishops refused to recognize the authority of Patriarch Ishoyahb III (in office 650–660). They argued that Rew Ardashir had received the Good News from the apostle Thomas, while Seleucia-Ctesiphon had received it 'only' from the student of his student Addai. Thus, the metropolitan of Rew Ardashir could never be subject to the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon.[62] But Ishoyahb enjoyed the support of the Arabs; the catholicos removed India from the metropolitanate of Fars and forced the rebellious bishops to surrender. When separatist stirrings began in Qatar as well, he deposed the bishops and mobilized the lower clergy and monks.[63] Thus did the patriarch succeed in preserving the unity of the Church.

The Church had to withstand another test when in 692/693 the intriguer John the Leper succeeded, against the will of the bishops, in having himself appointed patriarch, in place of the disgraced Henanisho I, by the Muslim governor of Kufa. After John's death around 693, Henanisho's authority was limited to the northern archdioceses; the patriarchal see remained vacant until the election of Saliba-Zakha (in office 714–728).[64] During this time, Arabic replaced Syriac as the vernacular language of the Nestorians of Mesopotamia; under Patriarch Elias I (in office 1028–1049) Arabic also became the legal language for Christians, although Syriac remained the liturgical language.[65]

With Timothy I (780–823), a personality extraordinary in many regards assumed the patriarchal throne. He guided the Church under five caliphs for more than four decades; not only was he an important writer, corresponding extensively with his bishops, but he was also distinguished by great missionary zeal and displayed remarkable diplomatic abilities in dealing with the civil authorities. Under his leadership, the Church of the East achieved a brilliant highpoint at a time when Christians presumably constituted about 40 per cent of the Mesopotamian population. At first, his initial year in office did not bode well, as he won the patriarchal election thanks to intrigue and trickery. On the eve of the election he showed the electors bulging sacks of money and suggested that they would be richly rewarded for his election. However, after his successful election, the money bags were revealed to be full of stones, and Timothy rebuked the electors: 'The priesthood is not to be sold for money.'[66] Then one of the losing candidates, Metropolitan Joseph of Merv, slandered the patriarch before Caliph al-Mahdi, accusing him of being a sympathizer with Byzantium. But al-Mahdi did not act on the slander, whereupon the disappointed metropolitan converted to Islam.[67] When in 781 the highest-ranking metropolitan of the Church, Ephrem of Gondeshapur, who likewise had campaigned for the patriarchal office, went into schism with other bishops, the powerful Nestorian personal physician of Caliph Isa al-Quraisch reconciled the two prelates.[68]

That the new catholicos was a personage as winning as he was persuasive was made evident in his second year in office, when he not only

persuaded the initially anti-Christian caliph al-Mahdi to have the destroyed churches rebuilt but also engaged in many theological disputations with him. At one such discussion, the caliph asked the patriarch a delicate question, what he thought of Mohammed. Timothy's reply, flexible in form but unyielding in content, was, 'Mohammed is worthy of all praise, by all reasonable people. He taught the doctrine of the unity of God and thus walked in the path of the prophets. All prophets separated men from idolatry and polytheism and attached them to God and his cult, so it is obvious that Mohammed walked in the path of the prophets.'[69] Although Timothy praised the work of Mohammed, he was on his guard about describing him as prophet – Mohammed was not the paraclete, he merely trod the path of the prophets. When the caliph demanded that he recite the Islam statement of faith, 'there is no god but God', the catholicos stated more precisely, 'I stand by these words and will die with them. I believe in one God in three and three in One, but not in three separate deities, but rather [in the principle] of God, his Word and his Spirit.'[70]

Caliph Harun al-Rashid posed a still more difficult question: 'Father of the Christians, tell me in a few words, which religion is, in God's judgement, the true one?' If the patriarch named Christianity as the religion most pleasing to God, he would insult Islam; but if he named Islam, he would be an apostate. His diplomatic answer was, 'That religion that accords with its principles and laws to the actions of God with regard to his creation.' The caliph admitted defeat and remarked after the discussion ended, 'By God, he replied in a complete and unimpeachable fashion. He considered his own religion and the principles of his Gospels: love your enemies as you love yourself.'[71] The patriarch's words perfectly summarized the argument of the Nestorian apologists for proof of Christianity's superiority: only Christianity taught generosity and the forgiveness of sins, which most closely resemble the actions of God. However, the benevolence shown towards the patriarch did not keep Harun from ordering the destruction of all churches in the region bordering Byzantium in 807 and reinstituting the discriminatory sumptuary laws. A minority of the destroyed churches were rebuilt in the following years.

God moves a mountain for the Christians of Baghdad. The caliph gave the Christians an ultimatum: either move a mountain or accept Islam or be tortured to death. In this regard he appealed to the Gospel of Matthew: 'If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move from here to there, and it will move"' (Mt 17:20). God raised the prayer of the frightened Christians, and many Muslims are said to have converted to Christianity. (Illustrated manuscript of Marco Polo's Book of the Wonders of the World *from 1412. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Ms. fr. 2810, fol. 10v. RCC 18391.)*

Under Caliph al-Ma'mun (ruled 813–833), who entrusted the leadership of his new state library to the Nestorian Yuhanna Ibn Massawah, the Church of the East also enjoyed great respect. However, its status remained dependent on the personal views of the caliph then in power, as was made painfully evident under Caliph al-Mutawwakil (ruled 847–861). Earlier, in 837, Caliph al-Mu'tasim (ruled 833–842) built the new capital of Samarra almost 100 kilometres north of Baghdad, since his Turkish mercenaries had outraged the capital's citizens with their violent behaviour. The chosen location was densely populated by Nestorians and contained eight monasteries.[72] First, the caliph bought the monastery of Deir Adi, which he converted into a treasury. The other monasteries and

the Nestorian population had to give way to successive building projects.

But the new capital brought good fortune to neither the caliph nor the patriarch, who relocated there, for the Turkish mercenaries, who had become very powerful, forced Caliph al-Mu'tamid (ruled 870–892) to abandon Samarra in 889 and retreat to Baghdad.[73] Among the Nestorians, three elderly patriarchs held office within a period of just twelve years. The consequent power vacuum was filled by influential Nestorian physicians, who represented the Church at the theological debates, which were as popular as ever, and effectively led the Church. Thus was repeated the unfortunate development, familiar from the late Sassanian period, in which the patriarchs and their election became playthings of the powerful doctors. Catholicos Theodosius (in office 853–858) was such an example. First, he owed his nomination to the powerful and immeasurably wealthy doctor Bochtisho. But then Bochtisho's opponents slandered the physician before Caliph al-Mutawwakil, who confiscated his property and imprisoned the hapless patriarch for three years. Mutawwakil's intensification of discriminatory policies and the removal from office of Christian civil servants also took place during this period.

In the maelstrom of politics

The subsequent centuries witnessed a slow decline of both the Church of the East and the Abbasid caliphate. In the Church, politics and simony in the appointment to high ecclesiastical office played a growing role, while the increasingly arrogant Turkish mercenaries reduced the caliph to a political marionette. Simultaneously, the political unity of the empire collapsed. First, in the interior, the slave revolt of the Zang, which lasted from 869 to 883, shook the foundations of the state, and then several regions lying on the edges of the empire, such as Egypt, Yemen and Tunisia in the west and Khorassan (eastern Iran) in the east, declared their independence, reducing Abbasid state authority to the region of Mesopotamia.

Under Patriarch Enos I (in office 877–884) the Nestorians benefited from the 'discovery' in the state university of the treaty concluded between Mohammed and the delegation from Najran. The vizier Saad ibn-Makhlad, a convert to Islam, was very well disposed towards his former Nestorian brothers in the faith, and put this tolerant policy into effect.[74] But the revaluation of the Nestorian zimmi raised the ire of the Muslim rabble of Baghdad, who plundered the patriarchal see in 885 and 886. Such anti-Christian unrest arose again in 999, 1021, 1054 and 1055.

In 945 Caliph al-Mustakfi (ruled 945–46) made a desperate attempt to break the power of the Turkish mercenaries and handed over power to the northern Iranian family of the

The minaret, modelled after an Assyrian ziggurat, of the Great Mosque of Samarra, Iraq, near which existed eight Nestorian monasteries.

Buyids. But, by doing so, al-Mustakfi simply traded one evil for another, as the new rulers had him blinded and replaced with one of their own followers. From then on, the caliphate symbolized only the spiritual leadership of the faithful. The period of the Buyids (ruled 945–1055) witnessed the triumph of the Shi'ite branch of the faith, which recognized as rulers only descendants of Mohammed or his son-in-law Ali. Shi'ite dynasties of various types ruled in Egypt, Yemen, Khorassan and northern Mesopotamia, and the Buyids were also Shi'ites. The first 60 years of Buyid rule were quite peaceful for the Nestorians, not least because Emir Adud (ruled 949–983) named the Nestorian Nasr ibn-Harum as his vizier.[75] As history has always shown, orderly political circumstances granted the Christians relative security; in the case of power struggles and unrest, they were in danger of becoming scapegoats or targets for the wrath of the people.

In the mid-eleventh century Turks again entered Mesopotamia, but this time not as mercenaries but as an entire people. It was the Central Asian Seljuks, whose first leader may have been Christian or Jewish,[76] who conquered Baghdad in 1055 and dealt a crushing blow to Byzantium at Manzikert in 1071. Some of the conquerors settled in the vanquished Byzantine region, and the population of Asia Minor changed from purely Christian to purely Muslim. Except for in Istanbul and, to a small degree, Tur Abdin, Christians do not live in Turkey today. The Crusades (1097–1291) also began at this time and profited at first from the rapid splintering of the Seljuk Empire into smaller principalities. For geographical reasons, the Church of the East was barely affected by this. The Crusaders treated the few Nestorians living in the area under their control as heretics, like the Syrian Orthodox, Armenians and Maronites, who ought to be won for the Latin Church. Only the Maronites recognized the authority of Rome, around 1215, and remain united with it.

In Mesopotamia, however, the Nestorian community slowly diminished – not as the result of brutal persecutions but rather on account of financial burdens, the extortion of protection money, social barriers, juridical discrimination and the enslavement of those unable to pay taxes. The centre of Nestorian life shifted from Baghdad to the northern regions of Mosul and Kurdistan. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Nestorians, like the Jacobites and Melkites, greeted the Mongol khan Hülägü – whose mother Sorqaqtani-Beki and chief wife Dokuz Khatun were both Nestorians – as a liberator. For the first time in its 1000-year history, the Church of the East met with the realistic prospect of being granted status equal to the state religion or itself becoming the state religion.

The preservation of ancient heritage

The eighth and ninth centuries were not only a golden age for the Church of the East but also the developmental period of a new Arab-Iranian culture. The Baghdad of that time was the crucible in which the philosophical and intellectual heritage of Iran, Greece, Syria and India were brought together under the guidance of a cosmopolitan Islam to create a new cultural synthesis. At a time when Europe threatened to sink into barbarism, this new Islamic culture gathered and preserved the treasures of antiquity and then in the twelfth century gave them back to the school of Toledo. Without the curiosity of the youthful Islamic spirit, whose intellectual passion was comparable to that of the European Renaissance, the West would never – or at least only later, when Greek scholars went to Italy after the fall of Byzantium – have found the way to its own forgotten roots. Because Arabic scholars and scientists themselves had no access to the ancient writings and did not know Greek,

they were dependent on the mediation of the Nestorians and Jacobites. In contrast to the Latins, who ignored Greek scholarship, the Syrians devoted themselves to it with a passion, beginning in the sixth century, and translated the Greek texts into Syriac.

The golden age of the translators coincided with the flourishing of the Nestorian School of Gondeshapur, which Chosrau had elevated to state university.[77] The relocation of the imperial capital from Damascus to Baghdad gave a tremendous boost to Nestorian scholarship for two reasons: First, since Gondeshapur was the leading centre of medical teaching in the empire, the caliphs looked to it for their personal physicians. Second, caliphs such as Harun al-Rashid and al-Ma'mun were true cultural patrons and systematically imported Greek manuscripts from Byzantium. The most important lay subjects were Greek and Indian medicine and astronomy, Greek philosophy, mathematics, finance and civil administration. In 832 the University of Baghdad, called the *House of Knowledge*, supplanted Gondeshapur. According to the ideal of the Greek physician Galen, which held that 'the good doctor is a good philosopher',[78] the best-known scholars were simultaneously physicians, philosophers and translators. In this way, the Nestorians, together with a few Jacobites, held a quasi-monopoly over this field of study until the tenth century. Even after the appearance of Arab scholars, the Nestorians maintained a leading role until the Mongol conquest of Baghdad.

The translations were usually made from Greek into Syriac and then, in a second step, into Arabic, with over 50 Syrian translators active in Baghdad alone at the time of Timothy. Thanks to this effort, which was encouraged by the caliphs, the Arab world had access to the works of the Greek philosophers Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus, the physicians Galen and Hippocrates, and the mathematicians Euclid and Ptolemy. The translation of the Septuagint into Arabic by Hunayn Ibn Ishaq (808–873) also took place during this period. Since the founding and financing of a hospital was considered by both Christians and Muslims to be pleasing to God, Baghdad, which had more than a million inhabitants, contained several hospitals, which were often led by Nestorians; in the tenth century every major city of the empire had a hospital. Not only were general practitioners active in these hospitals but also specialists such as surgeons, orthopedists, opthalmologists, dentists, pharmacists and psychiatrists.[79]

Individual Nestorian families built true dynasties of doctors, including the Bochtisho, who looked after the health of the caliphs and princes for eight generations. Thanks to their personal closeness to the caliphs, the Bochtisho not only amassed a great fortune but also exercised significant influence over their masters, which they used to the benefit of the Nestorian community. First, in 765 the physician Giwargis Bochtisho, who worked in Gondeshapur, was called to Baghdad, where he cured Caliph al-Mansur. When al-Mansur wanted to give him three young female slaves, he refused to accept them, since Christianity prescribed monogamy. Al-Mansur subsequently appointed the trustworthy Giwargis to look after his harem. Giwargis's son Bochtisho and his son Gabriel followed him as palace physicians, with Gabriel becoming a close confidant of Harun al-Rashid. When the caliph announced at an audience held upon his return from a pilgrimage to Mecca that he had prayed to Allah for the protection of his doctor, the Muslim ministers present were angered because Gabriel was not a Muslim. Harun replied, 'The welfare of the Muslims depends on me and my body and this depends on Gabriel, so their well-being depends on his art and life.'[80] That the Nestorian doctors even functioned as pastors for the caliphs is shown by the example of the physician Salmawayh ibn

Banan, of whom Caliph al-Mu'tasim said, 'My doctor Salmawayh is more important to me than the highest judge, for the latter cares only about my property, while the former concerns himself with my soul.'[81]

As the personal physician of Mutawakkil, Gabriel's son Bochtisho accumulated an unimaginably large fortune and went about only in a carriage made of ivory. Bochtisho's pointedly flaunted wealth angered even the caliph. When the doctor was drawn into the intra-Church conflict over Patriarch Theodosius, Mutawakkil was incensed, since he had grown weary of the ongoing arguments between the Nestorian factions. He had the patriarch arrested, expelled the Nestorian clergy from his capital Samarra, destroyed their churches and monasteries, and reinstated and intensified the discriminatory laws. At the same time, the irate caliph confiscated Bochtisho's fortune and sent him into exile in Bahrein, where Baghdad's one-time richest private citizen died a beggar in 870.[82] Boshtisho's son Yuhanna cared for Caliph al-Mu'tamid (ruled 870–892) and became upon the caliph's death the metropolitan of Nisibis. The last physician of the family of Bochtisho, Saïd, died in 1058. Another famous family of doctors were the Massawahs, from whom came Yuhanna (†857), the first head of the state university of Baghdad, whose library held over one million manuscripts.

The best-known and most productive Nestorian scholar was the Arab from al-Hira, Hunayn Ibn Ishaq (808–873). Hunayn was not only leader of Mutawakkil's court physicians and a leading scholar in the fields of medicine, especially ophthalmology, astronomy, meteorology, zoology, mathematics and philosophy, but also the best translator. In his translation work he proceeded according to modern methods, in that, prior to the translation, he gathered as many different texts as possible, in order to create the ideal starting point. Finally, he contributed to the development of a scientific Arabic vocabulary. Hunayn was also head of the state library and received the title *prince of the translators.*[83]

A famous episode from Hunayn's life indicates that at that time the Nestorians were certainly familiar with pictorial representations.[84] In 854 a few people who were jealous of Hunayn accused him in the presence of the patriarch and the caliph of being, like other Christians, an idol- worshipper, because he had commissioned the icon of the Virgin Mary that was present. As evidence against this claim, they demanded he spat on the icon. Since Hunayn feared that the anti-Christian caliph al-Mutawakkil could accuse the Christians in general of idol worship, he gave in and spit on the icon. But the reaction of the Muslim caliph, whose religion included an absolute prohibition on images of God, was unexpected. He was so upset with this impiety that he threw Hunayn in prison and confiscated both his fortune and his private library. The patriarch excommunicated him on the spot. After six months of Hunayn's imprisonment the caliph became very ill, whereupon Christ appeared to him at night in a dream and ordered him to pardon Hunayn; he would then cure him. In fact, al-Mutawakkil released him and demanded that his accusers pay Hunayn a large amount in damages, which he himself doubled. He then returned him to his office in all honour and returned to him his fortune and his valuable library.[85]

The extensive work of the Nestorian translators, addressed to a broad public, created an enormous demand for a suitable medium on which to write. This was no longer parchment but paper, which had developed originally in China. Paper was discovered at the time of the early Han Dynasty (202 BCE–9 CE) and improved by the courtier Cai Lun around 105 CE. In the early eighth century it reached the city of Samarqand, which had been conquered by the Arabs.[86] From there the art of paper-making reached Baghdad in 793,

and eventually the whole of the Mediterranean region. Beginning in the ninth century the *Suq al-Warraqin,* the paper-dealers' market, flourished in Baghdad, where over 100 paper shops offered sheets of paper. There interested people also found book dealers with the latest works, antiquarian book shops and professional copyists.[87]

The works of Greek scholarship translated into Arabic by the Nestorians found their way to the caliphate of Cordoba, founded in 756, to which belonged the Andalusian city of Toledo. After it was conquered by the Christian king Alfons VI of Castile around 1085, Christian, Arab and Jewish scholars there began to work with the Arabic documents and translate them into Latin. Towards the end of the twelfth century the rediscovery of Greek scholarship advanced to Sicily and Constantinople and then in the thirteenth century to Central Europe. The extent to which university activity in Western Europe was limited and censored by the Church is shown by the statutes of the University of Paris, composed in 1215 by Cardinal Robert of Courçon: they forbade students and professors from reading works in metaphysics, physics and all the natural sciences.[88] But other, more cosmopolitan spirits, such as Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274), undertook the attempt to reconcile the Christian revelation with the Greek primacy of reason. Later, in the Renaissance, the purely rational approach of the natural sciences broke free of the chains of theology.

The contribution of the Nestorian, Jacobite and Melkite translators of Mesopotamia was twofold. First, they built a bridge to the West and renewed Western philosophy and science. Second, they enabled the further development of Islamic scholarship, which led to a synthesis of Muslim thought and Greek science and philosophy, as can be seen in the work of Ibn Sina (980–1037) and Ibn Rushd (1126–1198).

The Church of the East and Islam

The young Mohammed is said to have been recognized as prophet first by a Christian monk, long before he himself perceived his task. Both Mohammed's biographer Ibn Ishaq and the historian Tabari recounted this tradition.[89] When Mohammed was nine or twelve years old, his uncle Abu Talib took him along on a trading journey to Syria. The caravan rested in the Byzantine city of Bosra, where the Nestorian monk Nestorius,[90] called Bahira by the Arabs, lived in a cell near a large hall church. Bahira saw from his cell how a single isolated cloud accompanied the caravan, casting a shadow only on Mohammed. He then invited the caravan to a meal. The monk questioned the boy and examined his body. When he saw on his back the sign of prophethood he said to Abu Talib, 'Take your nephew back to his homeland and guard him from the Jews; if they recognize him, they will do evil to him. Great things will come of your nephew.'[91] The fact that in the Islamic tradition the Christian monk vouches for the authenticity of Mohammed's prophecy shows that early Islam sought a close connection with Christianity and, simultaneously, a sharp distinction from the Judaism of the time.

It is conceivable that Mohammed, who was active for years as a trader, may have travelled to Syria and become familiar with Christianity there. He must also have been confronted with Christianity in his contacts with Christian Arabs – whether they came from al-Hira, Najran or his own area. It appears that Mohammed was aware of both Tatian's Diatessaron and the Gospel of Thomas.[92] Presumably he was most familiar with Miaphysite Christianity and least so with Nestorianism. Mohammed acknowledged Jesus not only as a prophet, called *Naby* in Arabic, but also as a messenger of God, as *Rassul.* God revealed a message to Jesus, but the Jews rejected it and him, and the Christians adulterated this

The Nestorian monk Nestorius, called Bahira by the Arabs, was the first to recognize that the twelve-year-old Mohammed, whom an angel from heaven is anointing, would be the heralded prophet. Nestorius (Bahira) gestures from the tower window towards Mohammed; his uncle Abu Talib bows before him. From the manuscript History of the World *by Rashid ad-Din, in Tabriz, northwestern Iran, written in 1306/1307. (Edinburgh University Library. Or Ms 20f 43v.)*

message into the New Testament (Koran, Sura 2:87ff.). For this reason, there could be for Mohammed no conflict in the content of the Old Testament, the true message of Jesus, and the Koran revealed to him, since God's revelation is always the same. Mohammed never criticized Jesus, only the Jews who denied him and the Christians who distorted his message.

For Mohammed, Jesus is not the son of God in an ontological sense but only metaphorically, at best; he is not God but rather God's servant. 'All praise is due to Allah, who sent his book down to His servant [Jesus]. And thus are warned all who say, "Allah provided himself with a son"' (18:1–4). In another sura, Jesus says of himself, 'I am a servant of Allah, He gave me the book and made me a prophet' (19:30). Mohammed's strict monotheism forced him to deny the divinity of Christ, since otherwise he would have had to have accepted the concept of the Trinity, which he understood as a kind of family-like tritheism. 'O People of the Book [Christians], do not exaggerate in your faith. The messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was but a messenger of Allah. Do not say, "Three." Desist. Allah is but One God' (4:171). The Koran categorically rejects an incarnation of God. In Sura 5, God speaks to his messenger Jesus, 'And if Allah says: O Jesus, son of Mary, have you said to the people, "Accept me and my mother as two deities beside Allah"? he will answer, "You are holy. I could never say that, for I have no right"' (5:119). In Islam only the revealed message is important, not the messenger, for he is only the mouthpiece of God, not God. Mohammed's view of the Trinity as a kind of divine triad shows that the above-mentioned Montanists or ideas from the folk religions of Arab tribes were his source in this regard.[93] Like Nestorius, Mohammed rejected the worship of Mary but not her veneration.

Since Jesus was, in Mohammed's view, not God, he must be, like Adam, a temporal, mortal man (3:59; 19:33ff). Nevertheless, the prophet rejected the idea of the crucifixion. 'And on account of their [the Jews'] talk, "We have killed the messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah"; while they neither killed him nor subjected him to death by crucifixion, rather he appeared to them only like [a crucified one]; and those who disagree on this matter are truly in doubt about it; they have no news of it but instead follow mere conjecture, and they have no certainty' (4:157). Islamic exegetes tried to resolve the question of Jesus's death: either Jesus was only apparently crucified, or another man was crucified in his place. It was speculated in this regard whether an unwilling person was seized or a Jewish leader or even Judas himself, or whether one of Jesus's disciples freely volunteered. Tabari supported the second view, according to which God removed Jesus before the crucifixion and granted his appearance to Joshua, a Jew who was present, so that he suffered death on the cross.[94]

It is clear that Mohammed, with his denial of the crucifixion of Jesus and rejection of the worship of Mary, primarily opposed the Miaphysites. On the other hand, Nestorian theology was relatively close to Islam, insofar as it rejected the Theopaschite death of the divinity of Jesus and the divinization of Mary as Theotokos. In this spirit, the Muslim theologian al-Dimaschqi (1256–1327) stated, 'What a splendid man is Nestorius, who said, I deny a God who lived in a mother's womb.'[95] Likewise, the Church of the East and the Koran both reject original sin. However, the Koran goes a decisive step farther in this regard, as it also denies the saving work of Christ. From the perspective of the Koran, God redeems humanity by revealing himself in his message and freeing the faithful from ignorance. 'Salvation' so understood is knowledge accepted by the people and lived out in their everyday lives; heathenism, by contrast, is ignorance, and sin is the conscious refusal to obey God's message.

And how did the Church of the East react theologically to the Islamic challenge? After the initial uncertainty about whether Islam was simply another Jewish sect, the ideas emerged that either it represented a Christian heresy, or the 'good' parts of the Koran were inspired by Christianity. In both cases the monk Bahira, known from the Islamic tradition, was the relevant source. In this spirit, the ninth-century Nestorian apologist Abd al-Masib Ibn Ishaq al-Kindi wrote that the monk Nestorius, alias Bahira, led Mohammed away from polytheism to monotheism and dictated to him a Koran which agreed with the Gospels. During Mohammed's later stay in Medina, the Jews compelled him to rewrite the Koran.[96] The Nestorian *Apocalypse of Bahira*, likewise from the ninth century, no longer assigns fault for the shortcomings of the Koran to the Jews but instead holds responsible Bahira himself, who humbly regrets his errors: 'O how wrong I was when I left my cell and came to this barren desert. I have planted bad seeds there, which will remain there until Judgement Day. I elevated vanity to truth, made possible the impossible, and set ravening wolves, vipers and wild animals upon the lambs of Christ. I set a violent and cruel people upon a peaceable people.'[97]

The Nestorian literature of the debate developed on three levels. First, proving the superiority of Christianity, and, second, closely related to the first, identifying the weaknesses of Islam. However, the Nestorian apologists had to avoid attacking Islam head-on or insulting the prophet. Third, they tried to explain ideas incomprehensible to Islam, such as the Trinity and the two-nature doctrine of Christ.[98]

The famous *Book of the Tower* listed six arguments for the superiority of Christianity.[99] First, Christ, unlike Mohammed, had performed

miracles and thus presented divine signs to illuminate for the people the way to the Good News. However, since the resurrection of Christ no more miracles occurred. The Nestorian Ammar al-Basri (†845) explained the disappearance of miracles by stating that with his gospel Jesus left with the people an eternal miracle, and that it was more commendable for the faithful to live rationally according to the gospel than on the basis of miracles, which appeal only to the physical senses.[100]

Second, Christianity is superior to the other monotheistic religions for ethical reasons, as it is the only religion that teaches those principles that correspond to God's relationship to his creatures. This argument, used by Patriarch Timothy in his debate with Caliph Harun, is based on the idea of the three divine laws. The present patriarch, Mar Dinkha IV, explains them this way: 'From Creation to Moses, God gave the law of reason, so that the people of this period were judged according to the unwritten law of their own conscience.' However, other thinkers, such as al-Kindi, interpreted this law negatively as the law of violence and of the stronger, with Mohammed falling into this category. 'With Moses the epoch of the second law, of justice, began; the people will be judged on Judgement Day according to the Ten Commandments. The third period, which will last until the Last Judgement, was initiated by Jesus Christ, as he gave the law of grace and forgiveness.'[101] Only Christianity teaches the law of grace, while Judaism is founded on the Mosaic Law and Islam, depending on the interpretation, on the first or second law.

Third, Christianity is the only universal religion. While Judaism applies only to the Jews and the Koran primarily to the Arabs, the Good News is addressed to all people, regardless of race or nationality. In contrast to early Islam, which forbade the translation of the Koran, the Gospels were translated into many languages.[102] As Hunayn Ibn Ishaq emphasized, Christianity is, fourth, rational and free of contradictions. For, although the apostles were uneducated, Christianity was also accepted by the Greek philosophers – for the Nestorians, like the Arabs, the standard for all scholarship.[103] The fifth argument points out that all the prophecies of the Old Testament were fulfilled in Christianity; and the sixth cites the willingness of the martyrs to sacrifice themselves. In this regard, al-Kindi underlined the fact that only defenceless, pacifist witnesses to the faith were true martyrs, not those, like the Islamic warriors, who fell in battle.[104]

The Nestorian apologists then cited five incorrect reasons why a religion would be chosen by people. Islam was always the primary target in the sights of the fiercest apologists, such as al-Basri and al-Kindi. The first, most important reason concerned violence. As Patriarch Henanisho had earlier explained to Caliph Abd al-Malik, a religion that established itself with the sword cannot be true, since this action entirely ignored the non-violence demanded by God.[105] Christianity, however, had triumphed not *with* the sword but rather *against* the sword of the Roman and Sassanian persecutions. So it was easy for al-Kindi to demonstrate that Mohammed was victorious in the first place thanks to his bands of robbers and successful military campaigns. The Arabs accepted Islam not on account of its religious message but 'either out of fear of the sword or out of greed for power and spoils'.[106] Allah's order to the desert Arabs that they participate in the wars of conquest (48:16) corresponds to Sura 4, which unambiguously places warriors above non-combatants: 'Allah grants a higher rank to those who strive and fight in the cause of Allah with their goods and their blood than to those who sit idle. Allah promises good to all [the faithful] but he elevates those who strive and fight above those who sit idle' (4:95). The door to paradise was opened to anyone who fell in the religious war:

'And those who are killed on Allah's path, [He] will lead to paradise' (47:4ff.). For the Christians, however, the so-called Holy Wars of the expansionist Muslims were nothing more than religiously legitimated Bedouin robber raids, carried out on a large scale.[107]

Al-Kindi and al-Basri cited as the second incorrect reason to accept a religion is an easy morality and the promise of blissful sensual pleasures in paradise. Here the two apologists referred first to Islamic polygamy and the ease of divorcing a wife, while Christianity, by contrast, demanded monogamy and permitted divorce only in exceptional cases. Second, they sneered at the very earthly rewards that pious Muslims expected in paradise, such as beautiful virgins, streams, milk and honey, etc. Mohammed had promised such base sensual pleasures in order to dazzle the uneducated and poor Bedouins. Ibn Sina also had to admit that the pleasures of paradise promised by the prophet were to be understood symbolically, as they would be of a spiritual nature.[108] Al-Kindi traced these serious defects of Islam back to the personality of Mohammed: 'He loved too dearly war, money and women [Mohammed had nine wives and at least six concubines] to be able to claim to be God's messenger.' Mohammed was so absorbed in his war-making, his wives and the conflicts among his wives that he had neither the time nor the energy to pray and think about God.[109]

For al-Basri, precisely one of the chief strengths of Islam, namely its simple dogma, was another reason to doubt its truth. Then al-Basri listed two further incorrect reasons for conversion to Islam: pan-Arab nationalism and the hope for financial or material gain. Finally, al-Kindi directly attacked the Koran: it contained contradictions and was poorly constructed. In fact, the suras are ordered not according to their content or their date of appearance but only on the basis of their length. Additionally, Arabic was unsuited for a religious book, since its vocabulary included many nuances for concrete items such as swords, camels, horses, etc., but few abstract terms. The affected language of the Koran was also far removed from that of Arabic poetry, which was recognized as superior.[110]

To the Islamic accusation that veneration of the cross was nothing but idol worship, Metropolitan Odisho of Nisibis replied that the sign of the cross is a sacrament; it is the Christian way of opening oneself to divine grace. The cross also showed the direction for prayer, analogous to the Muslim *qibla*. Al-Basri added that by venerating the cross the believer honoured the Creator, since the crucified one was 'God's veil', with which He revealed himself to us.[111] With these words al-Basri continued the traditional idea that Jesus Christ was both the Revealer of the glory of God and his impenetrable veil. Al-Kindi added in this regard that the cross did not represent idol worship, but the pilgrimage to Mecca and its associated rituals did, as they were founded on the cult of the pre-Islamic sun worshippers.[112] Al-Basri also defended the sacrament of baptism against the derision of the Muslims. First he referred to the great significance of ritual washing in Islam, and then he defined baptism as the 'symbolic understanding' of the resurrection of Christ. 'We ought to remember that we, too, will rise from the grave, as He arose.'[113] Then al-Basri explained the significance of the crucifixion and addressed the Muslims directly: 'God's grace and blessing [were revealed] in the crucifixion of Christ. O mortal man, instead of being grateful, you have fallen into unbelief and polemic.'[114] The crucifixion served to relieve creatures of the fear of death, or at least ease such fear. For al-Basri, God had intentionally displayed Christ's death and resurrection openly. In this way, people were to recognize that they would one day be resurrected just as Christ, who shared their nature, had been. In this regard, celebration of the Eucharist served to remind the faithful not only with words but

also materially of the possibility of resurrection and eternal life.[115]

With regard to the question of circumcision, the Nestorians appear to have surrendered to the pressure of their Muslim environment, as Metropolitan Elias of Nisibis (975–1046) boasted that 'we follow the actions of our Lord and his holy apostles by practicing circumcision'.[116] With these words, Elias responded to the claim that the Christians did not follow Jesus, who had been circumcised.

Since Islam and Christianity represented fundamentally different values in so many cases, although dialogue on topics of religion and religious anthropology were possible, they hardly ever bore fruit on either side. Excepted from this rule is the exchange of ideas, mentioned above, in the realms of philosophy[117] and science, a possible inspiration for the Islamic mysticism of al-Hallaj (858–922) and for Sufism, as well as the syncretistic religion of the Nusayri-Alawis. The religion of the Alawis, which spread primarily in Syria and Lebanon, was originally a Shi'ite sect, which adopted many elements of Christianity and Gnosticism in the ninth century.[118]

Is the Church of the East aniconic?

When in the nineteenth century Anglo-Saxon missionaries reached the Nestorians of Kurdistan, the absence of religious pictures and statues impressed them favourably. In their delight at having discovered unexpected kindred spirits, they labelled the Nestorians *Protestants of the Orient*. Grant, who arrived in Urmiah in November 1835, opined: 'Through the whole period of eighteen centuries the Nestorian Christians have remained pure from the defilement of image-worship.' The Presbyterian Justin Perkins concluded in 1834: 'Indeed, the Nestorians may, with great propriety, be denominated the *Protestants of Asia*.'[119] Basing their conclusions on these observations, later authors repeated like prayer wheels that the Church of the East had systematically rejected the veneration of images.[120] In fact, the modern East Syrian churches offer a spartan atmosphere, with a bare cross the only figurative element in the interior and no pictures to be seen. The only exceptions are found in small mountain chapels in the Iranian province of Azerbaijan, where occasionally a small, modern wall hanging with a depiction of Christ or a saint may be seen. But was it always so?

Early Christianity, like early Buddhism, was without images; it followed the Mosaic Law: *You shall not make for yourself an idol*.[121] But Judaism included rare exceptions, of which the murals, dating from between 243 and 254 CE, of the synagogue of Dura-Europos, which lay on the western bank of the Euphrates, are the most famous.[122] The first to produce pictures of Christ was the Gnostic sect of the Carpocratians, but they were deemed heretical.[123] Within the orthodox community, pictorial art developed in three stages: First, towards the end of the second century, an allegorical symbolism emerged, in which animals and objects such as the lamb, the dove, the fish, the vine and the anchor referred to symbolically suggested figures. Then the first depictions of people appeared around the mid-third century in the catacombs, where Old and New Testament figures and the Good Shepherd could be seen on the walls. The murals of the Christian chapel of Dura-Europos date from the same period. Here we find mostly New Testament scenes, such as the Good Shepherd, Jesus walking on the water, the healing of the cripple and the raising of Lazarus, as well as Adam and Eve and David and Goliath.[124] At the beginning of the fourth century the depiction of Christ, the apostles and the saints began to become more widespread; but it remained controversial. Supporters of images, such as the Cappadocian Fathers, argued that pictures helped educate the

'spiritually poor' and referred to an invisible, spiritual reality. In this way, veneration of images passes on to their spiritual model.[125]

The first general ban on images, however, was issued not in a Christian but in an Islamic state, when Caliph Yazid II (ruled 720–724) forbade religious images in 721. In this regard, he appealed to a *hadith*, a traditional saying of Mohammed: 'On the day of resurrection, Allah will punish most severely the makers of images, by demanding of them, "Bring to life what you have created".'[126] Whoever takes it upon himself to create life as Allah has will be punished with hell.

Only five years later the Byzantine emperor Leo III (ruled 717–741) began to condemn the veneration of icons; in 730 he issued a ban on images. Although the earlier edict of Yazid may have influenced the emperor in his iconoclastic actions, these also arose from intra-Byzantine political motivations. First, he wanted to use the ban on images to weaken the monks, who had become very powerful; and, second, he used his power to support the spread of images of the emperor, in order to demonstrate the authority of the state.[127] In the ensuing controversy, the Mandylion, the portrait of Christ painted by the ambassador of King Abgar, served the pro-icon faction as an argument that icons were pleasing to God. Not only had Christ permitted the creation of the painting, but the ailing king had also been cured of leprosy by it. Thus images served as mediators of divine grace.[128] The icon controversy ended in 843 with the reinstitution of the veneration of images. From then on sacred images were considered legitimate aids in making the invisible visible.

It appears that the Church of the East was not part of this controversy. Despite the extensive destruction and plundering of Nestorian churches and monasteries, we have enough clues and evidence that the Church of the East was very familiar with the veneration of images. However, it is very doubtful whether the veneration of icons developed with the same magnificence and to the same extent as in the Byzantine Empire. As far as the heartland of the church is concerned, the *Acts of the Martyrs* mention that 'the decorated churches' were destroyed by the persecutions of Vahram V in 422.[129] However, the decoration referred to could have consisted of crosses and plant motifs, as was discovered in the ruins of a church in al-Hira. More telling is the discovery made by German archaeologists in 1929 at Seleucia-Ctesiphon. In the remains of a church they found a life-size, painted male stucco figure, broken into several pieces. Unfortunately, the head was missing, so we do not know if the statue represented Christ or a saint.[130] In any case, this figure, dating to the late sixth century, proves that the Church of the East placed statues in its churches. A fresco fragment from al-Hira, which may show a praying figure, dates from the same period.[131]

As the excavation of Samarra near Baghdad, carried out by Ernst Herzfeld between 1911 and 1913, proves, the Nestorians of Mesopotamia had murals. An ancient historian reported on such frescos when he described the palace of al-Mukhtar and praised the 'wonderful paintings, among them the painting of a church with monks'.[132] In a private reception hall, on the fragments of twelve columns, Herzfeld discovered the depictions of four Christian bishops or priests. Above one head was the inscription *Miflah the Deacon*, which referred to either the cleric portrayed or the painter.[133] The paintings, which dated from around 837–839, were carefully removed and hidden in an unused water pipe, presumably when Caliph al-Mutawakkil expelled the Christian clergy from the capital in 850. The great Nestorian church of Famagusta on Cyprus was also decorated with murals and Syriac inscriptions around 1359. Fragments of the Nestorian murals can still be seen in the nave today.[134]

Besides the archaeological discoveries, we also have several written sources of evidence that the Nestorian churches of Mesopotamia were decorated with icons and murals.[135] In the eighth century the theologian Abraham Bar Lipeh testified to the general dissemination of icons: 'The Eucharist may only be celebrated before a cross, the Gospel, and an icon of our Saviour.'[136] Later, Bishop Ishoyahb of Nisibis (†1258) composed a polemic addressed to the Muslims under the title *Apology for Images*, and around 1340 Amr Ibn Matta likewise defended the veneration of icons.[137] Finally, a few East Syrian Peshitta Bibles and Gospels from Mesopotamia and Tur Abdin, illustrated with miniatures, have been preserved and show that the Nestorians provided their sacred books with pictures, too. These manuscripts are a stroke of luck, since, over the course of centuries, Turks, Kurds and Catholic missionaries systematically destroyed Nestorian libraries. The ten examples cited by Jules Leroy in his foundational work on Syrian manuscripts with miniatures date from between the sixth and seventeenth centuries.[138] The miniatures portray figures from the Old and New Testaments, as well as important events from the life of Christ, such as the baptism in the Jordan, Palm Sunday, the foot-washing, the Last Supper, the Resurrection and Pentecost.

Archaeological discoveries and many written documents prove that the Nestorians outside Mesopotamia also used pictorial representations. Among the archaeological discoveries is, in the first place, the three murals found by Albert von Le Coq in 1905 in Kocho in north-western China, which were part of a Nestorian church from the seventh/eighth centuries. They portray a priest blessing three of the faithful, another layperson and a rider holding in his right hand a staff topped by a Maltese cross; a cross also appears on his headgear.[139] Three years later Sir Aurel Stein found a Nestorian painted scroll from the early ninth century in a cave complex of Dunhuang, 550 kilometres east of Kocho. The male figure is depicted in the style of a Buddhist bodhisattva, but he wears four crosses: on his headgear, on the collar of his garment, as a pectoral, and he carries in his left hand a long staff ending in a cross; this figure is a Nestorian saint or Christ.[140]

Then there are the five gold-plated silver platters that were found in southern Siberia between 1909 and 1999. All five came from the valley of Talas in Kyrgyzstan, where silver is mined. Although the platters were crafted in the late Sassanian style, they date from the ninth to tenth centuries. The following motifs are depicted: the crucifixion, the visit of Mary and Mary Magdalene to the tomb and the ascension with Christ; King David; four riders; and twice presumably the siege of Jericho by Joshua. Syriac inscriptions in Estrangela describe the scenes.[141] Finally, several Nestorian gravestones from the thirteenth/fourteenth centuries were discovered in Quanzhou, the ancient port city of Zaitun on the Yellow Sea. On these were chiselled not only richly decorated crosses and altars but also hovering and seated angels. The winged angels indicate stylistic influences from both the Sassanian reliefs of the great grotto of Taq-e Bostan (Iran, sixth/seventh centuries) and the depiction of Buddhist heavenly messengers, called *Apsaras*, in Dunhuang.[142]

Several documentary witnesses leave no doubt that the Nestorians in China and Mongolia practised the veneration of icons.[143] The most famous is the stone stele erected in 781 in the Chinese capital of the time, Chang'an, modern Xian. 'In the twelfth year of Cheng Kuan [638 CE] the following edict was issued: *The very virtuous* [*Bishop*] *Alopen of the land of Ta Qin* [*eastern Mediterranean region*], *bringing his sacred books and images from far, has come to offer them at the supreme capital.*'[144] The text testifies that the Nestorian missionary Alopen, who reached Chang'an in 635, brought with him not only

Mural from 837/839 from the palace of al-Mukhtar in Samarra, Iraq, portraying a cleric of the Church of the East. Until 1921 the paintings, which were removed between 1911 and 1913, remained packed in crates, in which they were practically all destroyed.[42]

(Opposite right) Nestorian gravestone from southern China, inscribed in three languages (Syriac, Uigur and Chinese) and two scripts (Syriac and Chinese). It tells of the death of a woman named Elisabeth, wife of the government official Xindu, on 20 May 1317 and of her burial on 25 July 1317.[43]

(Left) A gilded silver platter from the ninth/tenth centuries, found in the region of Perm, Russia, but most probably made in the valley of the river Talas, Kyrgyzstan. The ascension of Christ is depicted in the upper circle, to the lower left the visit of Mary and Mary Magdalene to the tomb, and to the right the crucifixion. A cross is found in the centre of the platter, in the space below Daniel in the lions' den, to the upper left two soldiers at the tomb, and to the right, Peter and the cock.[44] The platter originated in a Nestorian context. (The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg.)

religious books but also pictures. At the same time, Emperor Gaozong of the Tang Dynasty (618–907) had a monastery built and ordered that his portrait be painted in the church. Later, in 742, Emperor Xuangzong had the church of Chang'an restored and the portraits of five Tang emperors painted there.[145] If the Nestorians had become aniconic, they would not have agreed to this.

About half a millennium later the Franciscan Rubruk, who stayed close to the Mongol capital of Karakorum in 1253/1254, reported of a Nestorian church, 'I entered trustingly into the Christian church and saw a very lovely altar. Images of the Saviour, the Holy Virgin, John the Baptist, and two angels were stitched into a cloth woven with gold.'[146] For his part, the Latin bishop John of Cora wrote around 1330, on the basis of the dubious information of Odoric of Pordenone (1265–1331), who had visited China in 1322, 'These Nestorians are more than thirty thousand in China. They have very beautiful and orderly churches with crosses and images in honour of God and of the saints.'[147]

The Nestorians first abandoned the veneration of icons in southern India around the mid-fourteenth century. The Catholic missionary John of Marignolli (†1357) wrote of his stay in Kerala in 1347/1348, 'The Jews, Muslims and some [Nestorian] Christians regard the Latins as the worst of idolaters because they use statues and images in their churches.'[148] At the same time, religious pictures began to disappear from the Nestorian churches of Mesopotamia for several

reasons that arose simultaneously. First, beginning in the early fourteenth century, the Church came under severe pressure from Islam, which had been intensified by the conversion of the Mongol Il-Khans of Mesopotamia. Then, between 1384 and 1388, Tamerlane (1336–1405) systematically destroyed all churches and persecuted the Christians of Mesopotamia, who fled from the fertile plains into the mountains of Kurdistan.

In order not to incite the wrath of fanatical Muslims and to avoid plunder and desecration, but also because of their poverty, the 'mountain Nestorians' rejected the pictorial decoration of their small chapels. Finally, in the nineteenth century, the Nestorian clergy accepted the interpretation of the Protestant missionaries and claimed that their Church had always been aniconic.

(Left) An angel announces the resurrection of Christ to Mary and Mary Magdalene as they arrive at the tomb with fragrant oil with which to anoint the dead Jesus. These women are the first people to hear of the resurrection, even before the disciples. From a thirteenth-century Nestorian Peshitta Gospel, written in Estrangela. (State Library of Berlin, Prussian cultural collection. Sachau 304, parchment manuscript 195 Bl., Folio 106v.)

(Right) The twelve apostles are gathered around Peter, depicted as an old man, at Pentecost; twelve rays of light from heaven stream down upon their heads. From a thirteenth-century Nestorian Peshitta Gospel, written in Estrangela. (State Library of Berlin, Prussian cultural collection. Sachau 304, parchment manuscript 195 Bl., Folio 123 v.)

VIII The Mission to the East

Nestorians along the Silk Road of Central Asia

Sogdia and the Land of Seven Rivers

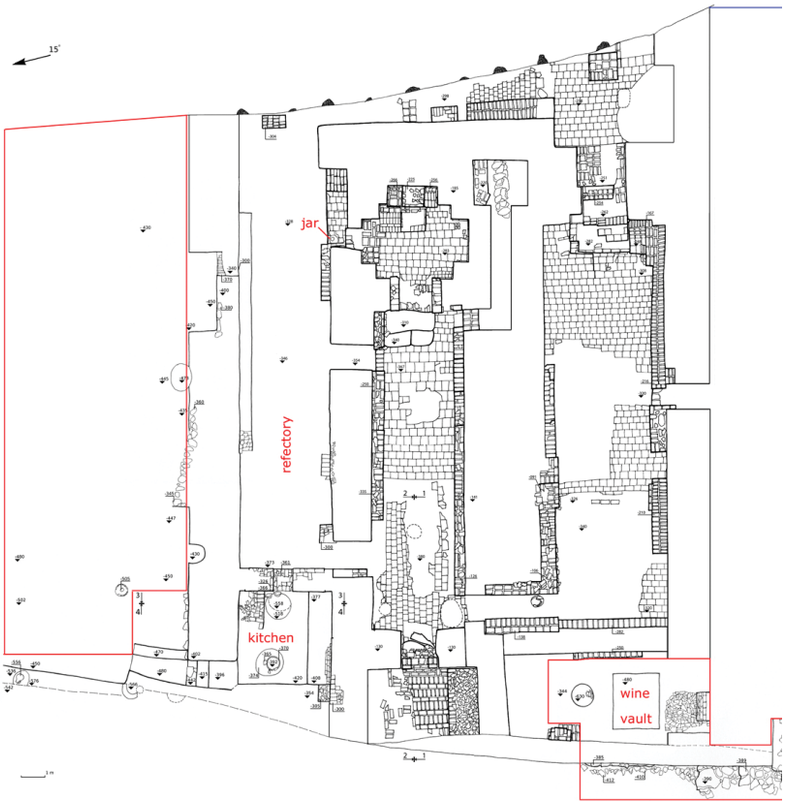
Early in its history the Church of the East oriented itself towards Asia.[1] Already at the beginning of the third century there were East Syrian communities on the Caspian Sea and in Transoxania. In the fourth and fifth centuries East Syrian Christianity reached Khorassan and, farther east, some Hephtalites may have come into contact with Christianity towards the end of the fifth century. About half a century later, around 550, the Hephtalites asked for a bishop.[2] When some Turks from the First Turkic Empire forced the Hephtalites out of the region that is today southern Uzbekistan and northern Afghanistan, the Nestorian metropolitan of Merv, Elijah, converted them in 644 by outdoing the magic of their shamans.[3] That Christianity fell on fertile ground among the Turkic peoples is also indicated by a letter from Patriarch Timothy written in 792/93: 'The king of the Turks [a Turkic people] abandoned idol worship and, together with nearly his entire people, became Christian. He asked us to create a metropolitan see, and this we have done.'[4] As Mark Dickens established, these converted Turks were the Qarluqs and the new see was probably located in Talas, their capital. The Nestorian cathedral of Talas was converted into a mosque in 893. The conversion of these Qarluq Turks occured between 780 and 783.[4A] Additional metropolitan sees were located in Samarkand which was established in the sixth or seventh century, and in Herat.[5] No architectural evidence of Christian structures has been preserved in Samarqand, but the Iranian historian al-Juzjani reported that a fight between Christians and Muslims led to the destruction of a church around 1256/1259.[6] Marco Polo's description of a magnificent church dedicated to John the Baptist, which roused the ire of the Muslims, most likely refers to the event recounted by al-Juzjani.[7]

However, 30 kilometres south of Samarqand, near Sufyon, south of Urgut, more than one hundred and sixty brief inscriptions in East Syriac Estrangela and chiselled crosses found on a cliff and in three caves testify to a medieval Christian presence. That a Christian establishment was located near these epigrams was already indicated by the tenth-century Muslim geographer Ibn Hawqal. He described a [Nestorian?] monastery near Samarqand, which he visited in 970. 'Al-Sawadar is a mountain south of Samarqand. Near Samarqand one sees a monastery of the Christians, where they gather and have their cells. I encountered many Christians from Iraq, who moved here on account of the good and remote location and the healthy climate. Many Christians have retreated

The double-naved church of Urgut in 2007. The photo is oriented from the west to the east.

Syriac inscription removed from the stone wall of Kutirbulak in 1936. The word baxt *to the left of a cross in Syriac script and Persian language means '(good) luck, fortune'.*[44A] *(Historical Museum of Samarqand. Nr. A-308-1.)*

here, for the place towers above Sogdia; it is called Warkudah (Wazkarda).'[9] The fortuitous discoveries in 1916 in the region of Urgut of a locally made bronze censer from the eleventh century, decorated with scenes from the New Testament, and later of a small cross made of local slate underline Sufyon's Christian past.[10] The excavation conducted under the auspices of the Swiss Society for the Exploration of EurAsia from 2004 to 2007 revealed a double-naved church oriented east-west. Standing at about 1.5 km to the east of the church was the cliff with the ancient Syriac inscriptions. The main entrance to the church was an arched doorway leading to the northern nave, which was probably the main chapel. In front of this main entrance stood a rectangular narthex and at the eastern end of this chapel stood the *shqaqona* (narrow passage), leading to the cross-shaped chancel. The nave was paved with ceramic tiles and niches were identified in the right, southern wall. Oil lamps were probably placed here, as suggested by the several oil lamps that were found during the excavations. The southern nave, which was slightly longer and wider, had the same layout as the northern one, but no western entrance. The southern chapel could only be accessed through a narrow entrance from the northern chapel. No indication of a *bema* was found in either nave. Tiny painting fragments of emerald green, ochre, carmine, white and cobalt colours were found in both chancels, indicating decorative paintings of unknown patterns and contents. The architectural concept of such a double-nave



Plan of the double-nave church of Urgut at the end of the excavations in 2007.

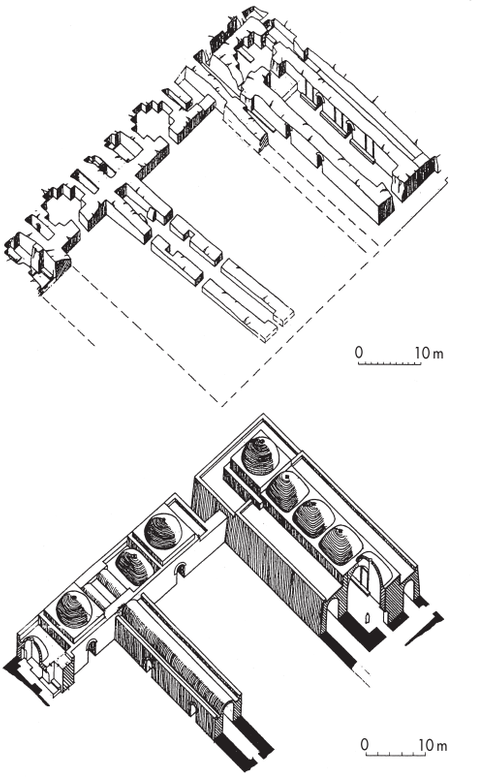
church is similar to those of Nestorian churches in Mesopotamia, where there are also triple-nave churches. One example is the church at Deir Bazyan in Kurdistan, Northern Iraq, which resembles the triple-nave church of Ak-Beshim in Kyrgyzstan (see p.174 and chapt. XIII). To the north of the northern chapel and parallel to it, there was another long rectangular room that can be identified as the refectory. At the western end of this room, there was a kitchen with several ovens and a cesspit. A wine vault was found to the west of the southern chapel. Finally, two small metal crosses and clay tiles imprinted with crosses were found in an exact stratigraphic context. The analysis of all structural material such as coins, tiles, ceramics, bricks, and glass objects showed that the monastery was in use from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries. Radio carbon analysis, though, indicated that it was founded in the late seventh century. From the nearby inscriptions on the cliff and in the caves, two bear dates: 752/53 CE and 1241/42 (or 1247/48, 1261/62 or 1267/68 CE), which is in line with the archaeological data.[11]

Numerous other small discoveries indicate that Christian communities flourished in Transoxania. Among the most important of these finds are the coins from the seventh/eighth centuries found near Tashkent, Samarqand, Varachsha north of Bukhara, Paikent and Penjikent, which show on the reverse a cross or on the obverse a ruler with a cross adorning his crown. These discoveries are significant because only cities or rulers could mint coins. There are

at least 14 known coins with a lion on the obverse and a cross on the reverse, minted between the late seventh and early eighth centuries by Khunak, the khuda (ruler) of Vardana who extended in 689 his authority over Bukhara. He and his family might have been Christians, but the majority of his kingdom certainly not. Likewise from Penjikent are an eighth-century ceramic shard bearing psalms from the Peshitta written in the Estrangela script and a bronze cross; from Samarqand comes a golden cross, as well as a flask decorated with crosses and a saint, and from Quba in Ferghana a silver pectoral dating from the tenth or eleventh century.[12] In southern Sogdia, at the right bank of the Amu Darya (Oxus), a complex of eighteen caves located south-west of the Tajik town of Aywaj close to the Uzbek border, probably testifies to a former Nestorian presence. The site was investigated by Soviet archaeologists

(above) Ruins of the ancient city of Gyaur Kala, Mizdachkhan, Uzbekistan. The discovery of Christian ossuaries in the nearby necropolis suggests that, besides Zoroastrians, Christians of the Church of the East lived in the city of Gyaur Kala, the City of the Infidels.

(left) In the necropolis of Mizdachkhan at least eight ossuaries decorated with black crosses were found, analogous to the discoveries of Dreswanskaya in Merv. The upper part of the cross is missing on the lid; the latter belonged probably to another ossuary.



The southern church of the church complex of Ak-Beshim, Kyrgyzstan. The Nestorian triple church was in use from the eighth to the eleventh centuries. The church complex was situated inside the 'shahristan', the fortified centre of the town, in contrast to the Buddhist and Zoroastrian shrines that were located outside.

Floorplan and elevation of the triple church of Ak-Beshim.

in 1968-70 who found one of the cave domes decorated with a large Maltese cross. The two archaeologists and later Albaum believed that this complex east of Termez was for a certain time occupied by Nestorian monks, while other archaeological characteristics point to a Buddhist cave monastery.[13]

Nestorians also lived in Choresm, to the west of Bukhara, and Russian archaeologists found here, at the base of the ruins of the city of Gyaur Kala – the so-called 'City of the Infidels', which corresponds to ancient Mizdachkhan – a huge burial chamber containing some 200 ossuaries. At least eight of these clay vessels for the preservation of human bones were decorated on the front, side or on the lid with black crosses; a few of them display the form, often found among the Nestorians, of a cross whose arms taper inwards. Professor V. N. Jagodin thinks that there were additional ossuaries with crosses that are no longer visible today. He dates them to the seventh/eighth centuries and believes that in the pre-Islamic period a small Nestorian community lived here in a predominantly Zoroastrian region and adapted itself to popular Zoroastrian customs.[14]

Like the Zoroastrians, Buddhists and Manichaeans who lived in Sogdia, the Nestorians, beginning in the eighth decade of the seventh century, came under pressure from the attacking Arabs. Although the Sogdians were able to hold back the plundering Arabs every time for nearly 40 years, between 709 and 714 Kutaiba Ibn-Muslim conquered Bukhara, Samarqand and

Silver platter found in 1999 on the lower course of the River Ob in Russia. The platter from the ninth/tenth centuries, crafted in the post-Sassanian style and measuring 24 centimetres in diameter, presumably came from the Talas valley in Kyrgyzstan, which was famous for its silver mines and silversmithing and was settled by Nestorians. In the centre King David sits enthroned, playing a stringed instrument. His winged crown is a common attribute of rulers in Sassanian art. Two winged lions stand before his throne. To his right stands Crown Prince Solomon, to his left presumably David's wife and Solomon's mother, Bathsheba. Two angels hover above. The rim of the plate is decorated with 20 animals; they are connected with the signs of the zodiac or with Solomon's ability to understand the languages of all animals. Markus Mode however believes that the central figure in the platter represents Athbag-hurmazd, the Sogdian counterpart of the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda. [46] *(Museum of the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography of the Russian Academy of Sciences of Siberia, Novosibirsk.)*

Tashkent. Kutaiba spared only the Christians, because they belonged to the People of the Book, and had adherents of other religions – and above all the cultural leaders – killed or driven out.[15] When the tyrant was murdered in 715 the cities of Transoxania rose up,[16] and the region became a battlezone between the rebellious cities, the Arabs, the Türgesh and China, which occupied Tashkent in 750. Then the tribal alliance of the Turkic Qarluqs joined the side of the Arabs, and their united forces destroyed the Chinese army at Talas in 751.[17] And so Transoxania came under Muslim instead of Chinese rule; the victorious Qarluqs, some of whom later became Nestorians, occupied the Land of Seven Rivers around 766. But Samarqand remained an important Nestorian centre and maintained its status as metropolitan see; it also produced significant Nestorian personalities. The most famous Nestorian son of Samarqand was the vice-governor of the central Chinese district of Zhenjiang, Mar Sargis, who was mentioned by Marco Polo and who held office from 1277 to 1280 or 1282 and founded seven monasteries. His father and both his grandfathers, who likewise came from Samarqand, were renowned doctors, and his maternal grandfather cured Genghis Khan's youngest son, Tului (†1232).[18]

Another Nestorian stronghold in Central Asia was the Land of Seven Rivers lying in modern Kyrgyzstan and southern Kazakhstan. The region was under Chinese authority, with interruptions, from 657 to 751, and was soon conquered by the Turkic Qarluqs, whose upper class, in part, adopted Nestorian Christianity. As has been explained by W. Klein, two periods of Nestorian communities may be identified. First, the urban phase of the Sogdians, which lasted from the seventh/eighth centuries to the eleventh century, after which followed the second period, lasting from the early thirteenth century until about 1350, of Turkic agriculture and livestock raising.[19]

Russian archaeologists have excavated two Nestorian churches, used from the eighth to the eleventh centuries and thus dating from the first period, in Ak-Beshim, the ancient city of Suyab, important in its day. The smaller church shows similarities to the Mesopotamian clay brick churches of al-Hira, and the larger was an entire church complex, with three large churches and a chapel. The walls of the triple church, discovered in 1998, are made of tamped clay, and the vault of fired clay tiles. Several stucco panels decorated with crosses were found, as well as traces of gold leaf, a nephrite cross, a bronze cross with a Sogdian inscription and a mould for the production of clay crosses, which also bears a Sogdian inscription on its reverse.[20] In a room beside the southern church, the archaeologists came upon fragments of a mural, whose rosette motif is also found in the paintings of Dunhuang in north-western China, and there in caves 150, 157, 302 and 440 – 442 from the tenth to eleventh centuries, which is not unexpected, since Dunhuang and Suyab both lay on the Silk Road.[21] They also found in room 24 of the northern church ten fragments of a not yet deciphered manuscript. It is the oldest paper find in Kyrgyzstan.[22] In a wall niche in the neighbouring room 23 the archaeologists

A Sogdian inscription and a Nestorian cross from the year 825/826 on a free-standing stone near Tanktse in eastern Ladakh, northern India. At least eleven crosses are to be found here. The inscription reports that a Sogdian messenger from Samarqand accompanied a likely Christian, presumably Nestorian, monk to Tibet.

found human bones, most likely those of a saint; presumably the room was used for incubation.[23] The triple church was in use from the eighth/ninth centuries to the tenth/eleventh centuries, and was in the end misused as a storeroom. In Krasnaja Retschak, ancient Navakat, 15 kilometres farther east, the discovery of five pectoral crosses from the eighth to the tenth centuries, as well as a Sogdian inscription on a large ceramic vessel, suggests that a Nestorian community lived in Navakat as well.[24]

Additionally, we know that the great church of Taraz (Talas, Dzambul) in Kazakhstan was converted into a mosque in 893, at the same time as the one in Mirki, Kazakhstan.[25] Finally, a silver wearable cross excavated in Kostobe, ancient Jamukhat near Taraz, and a fragment of a clay pot engraved with three crosses found in 1999 in south-eastern Kazakhstan at Kayalik, Rubruk's Caialic, testify to a former Christian presence. The most important Christian artefacts from the Land of Seven Rivers are the five gold-plated silver bowls, mentioned earlier, which were found in southern Siberia but were presumably produced in the valley of the Talas.

Tibet

In a letter written in 795/798 to his good friend Sergius of Elam, Patriarch Timothy referred not only to the Turks but also to Tibet: 'The Holy Spirit has in these days consecrated a metropolitan for the Turks, and we are preparing for the consecration of another metropolitan for the land of the Tibetans.'[26] Assuming that the patriarch could carry out his intention, it remained unclear where the Tibetan metropolitan see would be located. Presumably not in Lhasa but rather in Dunhuang, which in those days lay on the Silk Road and today is located in the Chinese province of Gansu. In the religious cave complex of Dunhuang, which belonged to the Tibetan Empire from 781/787 to 848, European explorers found in cave 17, which had been sealed since 1036, tens of thousands of manuscripts. Although the vast majority were

Buddhist, there were also Nestorian documents, among them eight fragments written in Chinese. The Tibetan document Pelliot tibétain 351 mentioning 'the God called Jesus Messiah,[...] the judge at the right of God', however, is a syncretistic divination and not strictly speaking Christian. The same applies to Pelliot tibétain 1182 and 1676 which feature crosses.[27] According to a Chinese chronicle, Nestorian Christians lived in Gansu prior to the establishment of the metropolitan see, as they tell of the great family of one Mar Sargis, who settled in 578 in Lintao on the Silk Road.[28] During the Mongol period the metropolitan see of Tibet was assimilated into that of Tangut, whose centre was in what is today Ningxia. Three fragments of Nestorian writings, two in Syriac and one in Turkic, were also discovered in the city of Kara Khoto on the northern border of Tangut.[29]

Another fascinating hypothetical Nestorian witness is found in Tanktse, in eastern Ladakh, which belonged to the Tibetan Empire from c. 644 to 842 and then to western Tibetan principalities. Three large and eight smaller Maltese crosses, as well as a bird – perhaps a dove – and inscriptions in Tokharian, Sogdian, Chinese, Arabic and Tibetan are carved into a massive free-standing rock and a couple of smaller rocks. A longer Sogdian inscription reads, 'In the year 210 [of the Arabs – i.e. 825/826] we sent Caitra of Samarqand, together with the monk Nosfarn, as messengers to the Tibetan king.' Another short Sogdian inscription, placed above a cross, may mean *Yisaw* – that is, Jesus. Finally, a Tibetan inscription dates to 774 or 834. If one assumes that the two Sogdian inscriptions and the three large crosses are connected, we can conclude that a Sogdian trader accompanied a monk in 825/826 to the king of Tibet.[30] The large rock was considered sacred even in the pre-Christian period, and the upper side, facing the sky, is decorated with many Bronze Age motifs, such as hunting scenes, yaks, deer, spirals and swastikas.

Fragment of a mural from a Christian sacred building, Kocho, Xinjiang, China. The painting, measuring 61 x 67 centimetres and dating from the seventh/eighth centuries, shows a man of Near Eastern descent, presumably a priest, holding a vessel in his right hand. Before him stand three people with slightly bowed heads, holding boughs in their hands. The hoof visible above has led to the interpretation that the scene portrays a Palm Sunday rite.[47] More likely, the painting depicts a greeting scene widespread in Turkistan, or the motif was adopted from a Buddhist context. There the faithful carry a flowering branch, often a lotus bud, symbolizing the desire to be reborn in the paradise of Amitabha.[48] In this case, among Christians the bough would express the hope for resurrection. (Museum of Indian Art, Prussian cultural property. Inv. III 6911.)

The location of these discoveries is not surprising in that Tanktse lay on a branch of the Silk Road linking Sogdia and Bactria with central Tibet. At that time Sogdian merchants controlled the long-distance trade and maintained trading settlements in all the large cities, presumably including Lhasa. The Sogdians were of eastern Iranian – that is, Indo-European – origin and inhabited the region north-east of the River Oxus, today's Amu Darya. Thanks to their extensive trading and travelling capabilities through Central Asia to China, Tibet, Nepal, Kashmir, India, Bactria and Iran, the Sogdians – who believed in a pantheon of Iranian deities represented under Iranian, Buddhist and Hindu traits – acted rather like cultural bees, pollinating the peoples they visited with their own ideas and religions. Since the office of priest did not rule out the possibility of marriage, Sogdian traders could also carry out missionary work and prepare the way for the subsequent monastic missionaries.

Eastern Turkistan

It is not surprising that Christianity and Manichaeism spread along the main access of the

Aerial photography of Kocho, the former capital of the Uigur Empire, Xinjiang province, China.

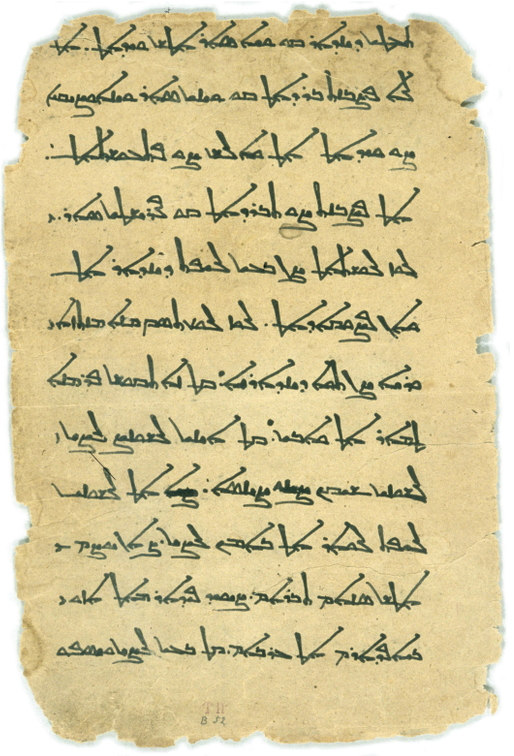
Silk Road, which ran from Afrasiab (Samarqand) to Kashgar in the modern province of Xinjiang. From there traders travelled either on the northern Silk Road through Turfan and Hami to Dunhuang or along the southern route via Yarkand and Khotan likewise to Dunhuang and then farther through Gansu to the capital of Chang'an.[31] Presumably, Nestorian Sogdians spread Christianity from Kashgar along the southern route to Yarkand, Khotan, and perhaps also Miran to Dunhuang, while Christian communities emerged in Aksu, the oasis of Turfan, and Hami on the northern Silk Road.[32]

A large Nestorian community lived in the oasis of Turfan, and it was here that A. von Le Coq discovered Nestorian murals in a chapel in Kocho, the capital of the western empire of the Uigurs (c. 850–1209/1250).[33] Between 1904 and 1907, in the nearby monastery ruins of Bulayiq and in Qurutqa, German archaeologists found in the earlier monastery library about 500 Christian-Sogdian text fragments and numerous manuscripts in Turkic and Syriac, as well as bilingual documents in Syriac and Sogdian and Syriac and New Persian.[34] In total, slightly more than 1100 Christian manuscripts and fragments have been found in the oasis of Turfan. Since the bilingual documents alternate between the Syriac original and the translation sentence by sentence, it may be assumed that the liturgy was celebrated bilingually in both the liturgical and the vernacular languages.

The great number of Sogdian text fragments may be explained by the fact that the Sogdian language was at that time the lingua franca of Central Asia. This discovery of Sogdian texts not only proved highly significant for Nestorian church history but also laid the groundwork for

the deciphering of Sogdian. In 1912 the philologist F. W. Müller stated, 'With this translation of texts of familiar Christian content [for example, the Peshitta], we now have the key to Sogdian.'[35] In the Turfan oasis and in Dunhuang, fragments of Nestorian documents have been found written in at least six different languages: Syriac, Sogdian, Middle Persian, New Persian, Uigur Turkic and Chinese.[36] The multiplicity of languages in Nestorian texts, which were mostly translations of Syriac originals, reflects the strategy of the Church of the East: to maintain Syriac as the liturgical language and a source of unity but to make the writings available to the local believers in their native languages.

The monastery library held manuscripts of various types: in addition to the Pahlavi Nestorian psalter of Turfan, including the canons of Mar Aba, and dating from the 9th century[36a], there were fragments of the Peshitta, the Psalms, apocryphal works, books of pericopes, hymnals and liturgical texts for baptism and Eucharist, as well as the Nicene Creed written in Sogdian, from the ninth/tenth centuries. There were also legends, such as those of the adoration of the magi, St George, the discovery of the True Cross by the emperor's mother Helena and of Bishop Bar Shaba of Merv, and the history of the city of Nisibis. As would be expected in a monastery library, it also contained several monastic biographies, the *Acts of the Persian Martyrs* under Shapur II, works of famous ascetics, and texts on monastic themes such as renunciation of the world, fasting, solitude and meditation.[37] Some manuscripts suggest that the Nestorians of the Turfan oasis were in regular contact not only with the mother Church in Mesopotamia but also with Central Asian Melkites and private citizens in the Byzantine Empire.[38] It is also noted that the Nestorians were not the only Christians at that time along the Silk Road of Central Asia. Melkites lived in the Crimea and in Choresm on the Oxus, and the Jacobites had established dioceses in Khorassan and Herat; Jacobites also lived in Tashkent and Yarkand.[39]



Christian Sogdian manuscript in Nestorian script from the Nestorian monastery of Bulayiq, Xinjiang, China. 20 x 13.5 centimetres, around eighth/nineth centuries. The manuscript deals with the Legend of the semi-historical Mar Bar Shaba, first bishop of Merv. (Depositum of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences in the State Library of Berlin, Prussian cultural collection, Oriental department, n180 recto.)

In terms of content, it is striking to see the extent to which the legends of George and Bar Shaba emphasize the resurrection of the human body. They accord with the typical Nestorian stress on the resurrection of Christ and its consequences for the faithful, and place the resurrection at the centre of the missionary message. With this emphasis on the reawakening of the whole person, including his body, and the implicit approval of corporeality and the materiality of the world, Sogdian Nestorianism placed itself in diametric opposition to its rivals, Buddhism and Manichaeism. For both these religions, the body is considered not something to spiritualize and perfect but rather a burden, which impedes development and should be cast off and left behind. For Buddhism and

Manichaeism, *samsara* and *cosmos* are places of suffering and corruption, while for Nestorian thought they are the gateway to return to the perfect original state before Adam's fall into sin. As H.-J. Klimkeit has demonstrated, these fragments attack Buddhism head-on by portraying the important tutelary deity Mahakala as a 'helper of the devil' because he denies the resurrection of the dead.[40]

While the Sogdian fragments avoid syncretism, the later Uigur Turkic (Yuan Dynasty) and earlier Chinese (Tang Dynasty) texts enter into a dialogue with their environment and conform to it in parts. A clear example is offered by the legend of the magi, who brought Jesus three gifts, which had a special symbolic meaning in the Central Asian context. With regard to Jesus, the magi thought, 'If he is the son of heaven [God's son], he will accept myrrh and frankincense; if he is a khan [ruler], then gold; and, if he is a physician and healer, then medicine.' Jesus guessed their thoughts and said, 'I am a son of heaven, I am a ruler, and I am a physician and healer too.'[41] The descriptions take into account ideas of the Central Asian Turks, who worshipped the sky as the invisible, highest god and called their rulers 'son of heaven' and khan. The Buddhist Turks, however, worshipped Buddha as a healing physician as well. This aspect corresponds to the Nestorian understanding of the role of Christ, who as the saviour also cured people of their physical suffering. The Manichaeans, who predominated in the realm of Uigurs, Kochos, adopted this function of Jesus and called him a 'noble doctor' and 'the physician of the wounded'.[42]

That the Manichaeans in eastern Turkistan comprised a community several times larger than that of the Nestorians is evident from the fact that well over 10,000 Manichaean manuscript fragments, some embellished with wonderful miniatures, were found in Turfan and Dunhuang at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Manichaeism was spread in eastern Turkistan first by Iranian refugees and Sogdian traders; however, it owed its powerful position to the conversion of the Uigur prince Muyu Khan and his family around 762. At that time, the capital of the steppe empire was in central Mongolia at Karabalgasun, but the Kyrgyz destroyed the first Uigur Empire in 840, whereupon the Uigurs settled in Gansu and in eastern Turkistan, founding a Manichaean kingdom there about ten years later. Although the princely family soon turned to Buddhism, the three religions lived here peacefully side-by-side until the fall of the Islamic empire of Mogulistan at the end of the fourteenth century.[43]

Bishop Alopen brings the radiant religion to China

> The Tao has no eternal name; the way has no eternal body. The suitable religion will be adapted to the regions and put into effect in such a way that all people will be saved.
>
> From the edict of Emperor Taizong, 638 CE.[44]

The Tang Dynasty (618–907) was the golden age of China. The Middle Kingdom was united and had trade relations with the entire known world: with Korea and Japan to the east, with Indochina and Indonesia to the south, with Tibet, Nepal and India to the south-west, and with Sogdia, the Islamic caliphate and far Byzantium to the west. The preconditions for China's renewed prosperity were established by Emperor Taizong (ruled 627–649) when he defeated the bordering kingdoms of the Eastern and Western Turks and brought the Silk Road, which ran through Turkistan, under Chinese control.[45] The cosmopolitan capital of Chang'an, modern Xian, had over a million inhabitants and was of incomparable magnificence. Here representatives of the various nations maintained trading

settlements, which also included religious institutions. In the China of that time various religions coexisted, and the multiplicity of gods was perceived as enriching the state. However, new religions were first examined by the office of rites, which also acted as the foreign ministry, to see whether they included any ideas dangerous to the state or society. The authorities then determined whether the new faith would be permitted in the whole empire, limited to communities of foreign merchants or generally forbidden. And so there reigned in China a balance between heaven and earth, which only periods of political instability and xenophobic nationalism could upset. Like other religions, the Church of the East benefited for two centuries from this cosmopolitan spirit, until it fell victim to a xenophobic initiative.

In 1623 or 1625 a two-ton stone stele, 2.79 metres tall and 99 centimetres wide, was unearthed near Xian. Like other steles, it stands on the back of a huge stone tortoise, symbolizing the stability of the world order. The front bears a total of 1800 Chinese characters, and at the bottom, in 23 vertical lines written in Syriac Estrangela and Chinese script, are carved the full colophon, dating the dedication of the inscription to February 781. Both the smaller sides of the stele are likewise decorated with Estrangela and Chinese characters, listing the names of the 70 donors.[46] On the upper section of the front one can see three pairs of dragons, twisted around each other, grasping in their claws a pearl surrounded by flames – a symbol of the sun. Beneath them, nine large Chinese characters proclaim: *Stele for the spread of the radiant religion of Ta Qin in the Middle Kingdom.* A Nestorian cross, placed on a lotus blossom between clouds and two tree branches, is engraved between the sun and the three upper symbols. Thus, Nestorian Christianity is represented visually in connection to Taoism and Buddhism and claims the elevated, central position. In this context, the clouds and the pearl symbolize the Taoist principles of yin and yang, and the lotus blossom, for its part, is a classic Buddhist symbol, representing how the purity of the spirit towers over the gloomy swamp of earthly existence. This motif, also found on Nestorian gravestones, suggests the fulfilment of Chinese religiosity in the cross of the resurrection.

The discovery of the stele was a sensation both for Chinese scholars and in Europe, as it proved that Christianity had reached China almost a millennium before the Jesuit Ricci, who lived there from 1583 to 1610, and seven centuries before the Catholic archbishop John of Montecorvino, who carried out missionary work, with modest success, in the Middle Kingdom from 1294/1295 to 1328. As far as Marco Polo's references to Nestorian communities – he lived in China from 1274 to 1291 – are concerned, they were often dismissed as products of mere fantasy. And now it was official: Christianity had flourished in China as early as the seventh

On the upper section of the Nestorian stone stele from 781, the nine Chinese characters announce: 'Stele for the spread of the enlightening religion of Ta Qin in the Middle Kingdom.' The cross above clouds, branches and a lotus blossom symbolize the fulfilment of Chinese religiosity in the cross of the Christian resurrection. (Bei Lin Museum [Forest of Stelae] in Xian, Shaanxi province, China.)

century and had enjoyed imperial protection. The historical section of the stele reads: 'When Emperor Taizong began his brilliant reign with glory and farsightedness, there lived in the land of Ta Qin a man of exceptional virtue named Alopen. He observed the heavenly signs, took the true scriptures and reached Chang'an in 635. The emperor sent the state minister, Count Fang Xüanling, with an honour guard to the western edge of the city to receive the guest and lead him to the palace. The emperor had the sacred books translated in the imperial library and examined them. He recognized that the teaching was right and true, and he permitted its dissemination.' In 638 the following edict was issued: 'The Tao has no eternal name, the Way has no eternal body. The suitable religion will be adapted to the regions and put into effect in such a way that all people will be saved. The very virtuous [Bishop] Alopen of the land of Ta Qin [eastern Mediterranean region], bringing his sacred books and images from far, has come to offer them at the supreme capital. It [this doctrine] touches on all the important aspects of life, it has no superfluous words. It helps all living things and encourages people. It is appropriate that it spread through the empire. For this reason, the authorities in the I Ning quarter of the city should found a Ta Qin monastery right away and accredit twenty-one monks. When the virtue of the ancestors of the Zhou [dynasty] was lost, the rider disappeared on the grey-blue [ox] to the west; when the wisdom of the great Tang shined again, the radiant breeze wafted to the east.' Then it was ordered that a portrait of the emperor be painted on the wall of the monastery.[47] Of the three so-called *Persian religions* – Zoroastrianism, Nestorianism and Manichaeism – the Sassanian state religion was the first to have its own temple in Chang'an, presumably beginning in 621 or, at the latest, 631.[48] Since Zoroastrianism wasn't really a missionary religion, the Zoroastrian priests of Chang'an served only the Iranian and Sogdian merchants there. In 635 the Nestorian Alopen, most probably a monk or bishop named Ardaban in Middle-Iranian, reached Chang'an. That Emperor Taizong sent a state minister and an honour guard to receive him outside the city walls suggests that Alopen either accompanied an official Sassanian delegation or, as Paul Pelliot believes, himself served as ambassador of King Yazdgerd III.[49] In fact, it seems unlikely that a mere missionary of an unfamiliar religion would be welcomed by a state minister and taken to the palace. We can thus assume that Alopen was also acting on the orders of his patriarch, Ishoyahb II.[50] Alopen's official status also explains why Emperor Taizong ordered the construction of a Nestorian monastery in the capital and graced it with his likeness. Pelliot believes that with this building the emperor was according with a wish of King Yazdgerd III. In this case, Yazdgerd's son, Piroz II, who lived in exile in China, would have

The pagoda of the Nestorian Ta Qin monastery, founded around 650, near Wuchun, Shaanxi province, China. An earthquake destroyed the monastery in the first half of the eighth century. In 963 the pagoda was rebuilt as part of a henceforth Buddhist shrine. Today it is a Taoist shrine but is still called Ta Qin monastery.[49] The seven-storeyed, 31-metre high pagoda was restored in 2000/2001.

On this pottery camel from north-west China and dating from the Tang Dynasty (618–907CE) the saddle bags on both sides are most unusual. They feature an almost naked bearded man being supported or even carried by two other men. In Chinese works of art a beard usually refers to a Westerner. While the central figure could represent the Indian god Kubera being slightly inebriated, his halo suggests another interpretation for representations of Kubera with a halo are unknown. The scene might well represent the Descent of Christ from the Cross. In that case, the camel was a burial object placed into the tomb of a Christian who was buried according to Chinese tradition but whose religion was indicated by this Christian motif. From the condemnation in 676 by Patriarch Giwargis I (in office 661–680) of heathen burial rituals at Christian funerals we can deduce that syncretistic burial customs were in those days widespread (see chapter IX, note 9). Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund 2000.8

been following the example of his father when he asked the court for the construction of a second Nestorian monastery in 677.[51]

The puzzling mention of the *rider on the grey-blue ox* should be understood in connection with the above-mentioned cross, carved among the clouds. For the rider is none other than Lao-tzu, the spiritual founder of Taoism, whom Emperor Taizong supported with his authority. According to tradition, Lao-Tzu, on account of the moral collapse of the late Zhou Dynasty (770–249 BCE), is said to have left the Middle Kingdom towards the west on a blue ox. Thanks to the establishment of the virtuous dynasty of the Tang, now the wisdom of Lao-tzu, in the form of the Nestorian religion, returns with

the help of the Holy Spirit – the radiant breeze. In this regard, it is surely no coincidence that the Ta Qin monastery was erected around 650 near Wuchun, 70 kilometres south-west of Xian, very near the most important Taoist temple of the time, Lu Guantai. In this temple, which was elevated to an imperial ancestor temple in 630, Lao-tzu is said to have written the Tao te-Ching, the literary foundation of Taoism, immediately before his rapture.[52]

East Syrian Christianity experienced a rapid upswing in the Middle Kingdom, as the stele goes on to report: 'The great emperor Gaozong [ruled 649–683] respectfully followed his ancestors. He granted the true doctrine further adornment and had a monastery of the radiant religion constructed in each of the [358] prefectures. He honoured Alopen and granted him the title *Great Master of the Law and Guardian of the Empire*. The law spread to the ten provinces, there were monasteries in a hundred cities, and families experienced glowing good fortune.'[53] The large number of monasteries presumably ought to be understood to mean that Gaozong granted permission for the construction of monasteries in all the prefectures, which does not mean that in fact all these were built. Eleven monasteries are known, of which seven have been located: two monasteries in Chang'an; the Ta Qin monastery near Wuchun, which is the only one preserved in parts; a monastery in Luoyang, the second capital of the empire; and monasteries in Lingwu in Gansu and Chengdu and Omei Shan, both in Sichuan.[54] In addition, there were large congregations in Canton and Dunhuang, and in the semi-autonomous Kocho. The Church of the East was now found along the whole of the Silk Road, from Damascus through Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Merv, Samarqand and Turkistan, as far as Chang'an.

But, as in the Sassanian Empire, in China the Church of the East remained dependent on the goodwill of the absolute rulers and was at the mercy of their whims. 'During the Shengli period [698–699] the Buddhists took advantage of the situation and raised their voices in the capital of the west, Zhou [Luoyang]. Towards the end of the Xientian period [712] a few vulgar men of letters spread derisive slander in the west of Hao [Chang'an]. But the high priest [archdeacon] Lohan [Abraham] and the very virtuous Jilieh [Gabriel], who were both of noble lineages and as monks had forsaken the world, came from the west. Together they lifted up again the mysterious rope; together they again increased the uninterrupted stitches. Emperor Xuanzong [ruled 713–756] ordered the five princes personally to visit the sacred buildings [the Nestorian churches and monasteries] and re-erect the altars there. The high beam of the law, which was for a time

bent, was repaired; the foundation stones of the doctrine, which had been knocked down, were built up anew. At the beginning of the year Tien Pao [742] the emperor commanded General Kao Lixe to hang the portraits of the five holy ones [the five previous emperors] in the monastery.'[55]

The apparent persecutions of the Church of the East in the late seventh century occurred at the time of the usurper Wu (ruled 683–705). Wu was one of the concubines of Gaozong's father and had been taken by the emperor upon his father's death – in defiance of both Buddhist and Confucian moral precepts. Wu was an unscrupulous intriguer. First she murdered her and the emperor's baby and attributed the murder to the empress, whereupon she took over the empress's position and had her rival cruelly executed. At the death of Gaozong in 683 she deposed her two sons and seized power for herself. She was a fanatical Buddhist, who elevated Buddhism to the state religion in 691. She considered herself to be Buddha Maitreya, who had been promised by Buddha Shakyamuni, but this did not prevent her from taking a Buddhist monk as her lover. When he failed in a military mission she had him whipped to death. Buddhist parties took advantage of this favourable situation by weakening their Nestorian rivals and destroying the monastery of Luoyang. Before Emperor Xuanzong I (ruled 713–756) brought an end to the turmoil, a few monasteries were plundered and ruined.[56] The Chinese branch of the Church of the East found itself in an obvious crisis, which came to an end only with Xuanzong's accession to the throne.[57]

The diocese of China owed its rescue to diplomacy, as the Arab caliphs used the Chinese experience of the Nestorians and employed their missionaries as advisers and translators. After the first Arab delegation reached Chang'an in 651, Bishop Gabriel arrived in China with the second in 713. After an unknown length of time, Gabriel returned and accompanied the third Arab delegation in 732.[58] In 744 the astronomer and bishop Jihuo (Giwargis) travelled via the sea route to Chang'an, where he, along with seven other priests, held a worship service in an imperial palace.[59] Bishop Giwargis took advantage of the favourable moment and asked the emperor, who was well disposed towards him, not only for permission to change the name of the Nestorian monasteries from *Bosi si* (Persian monastery) to *Ta Qin si* (Ta Qin monastery) but also that the emperor himself write the corresponding calligraphy.[60] To be allowed to use a calligraphic inscription from the hand of the emperor represented an extraordinary honour in China. Additionally, it was a clever move to distinguish themselves from the fallen 'Persian' dynasty of the Sassanians and avoid confusion with the other Persian religions. While the future of the bishopric or metropolitan diocese of China seemed once again assured, dark clouds were gathering above the Middle Kingdom.

The trigger for this crisis, which brought the Tang dynasty to the brink of the abyss, was the advance of the Arabs. Beginning in 741, together with their Tibetan allies they advanced from Sogdia and Bactria into eastern Turkistan. Following initial successes, the Chinese army suffered a crushing defeat in 751 at the river Talas in southern Kazakhstan. Then in 755 the Sogdian favourite of Xuanzong, General An Lushan (†757), exploited the weak leadership of the aged emperor and rebelled. He conquered Chang'an and forced the emperor, who abdicated in favour of his son Suzong (ruled 756–762), to flee. Thanks to Field Commander Duke Guo Ziyi (697–781), the powerful patron of the Nestorians, and Uigur cavalry, Suzong was able to quell the rebellion. When the Tibetans took advantage of the turmoil that followed An Lushan's death and themselves occupied Chang'an in 763, it was again Guo Ziyi who drove them out of the capital.

The military intervention of the Uigurs represented a turning point for Manichaeism, since

their ruler, Muyu Khan (ruled 759–779/780), converted around 762. Prior to this point, Manichaeism, which had officially reached the capital in 694, was, in contrast to Christianity, tolerated only within the foreign merchant communities. In 731, after an examination by the Office of Rites, Emperor Xuanzong I issued the following edict: 'The doctrine of Manichaeism is fundamentally a perverse belief. In a deceitful manner it pretends to be a school of Buddhism and in this way leads people into error. It deserves to be strictly forbidden. Because, however, it is the religion of western barbarians and other aliens, its adherents shall not be punished, as long as they practise it only among themselves.' In contrast to Manichaeism, which was condemned as fundamentally harmful, Christianity had been classified a century earlier as fundamentally beneficial and deserving of support.[61] Presumably the attempts of Manichaeism to emulate Buddhism – efforts bordering on plagiarism – were a particular thorn in the side of the authorities. That this accusation was never made of Christianity speaks to its autonomy.

And yet suddenly Manichaeism became the state religion of the Uigurs, on whose military aid the Chinese emperor was becoming increasingly reliant. The emperor now no longer stood in the way of its spread in the Middle Kingdom, and Manichaean temples and monasteries were allowed to be built. Nevertheless, Manichaeism appears to have found little approval among the Chinese populace, as its basic principles were too foreign. As a Chinese chronicle evaluated it: 'It [the Manichaean sacred book] says that men and women ought not to marry, that the sick may take no medicine, and that one must bury the dead naked. The unlettered folk will be quickly infected with the perverse teachings of this demonic religion. It belongs to the category of the 96 heretical western sects.'[62]

Because Christianity was also perceived as a Persian religion, it benefited from this new situation. In addition, Muyu Khan's successor, Alp Qutlugh (ruled 778/780–790), allowed Christians to engage in missionary work in the Uigur Empire.[63] Finally, Christianity enjoyed the favour of the powerful duke Guo Ziyi, who was not himself a Christian but whose general and adviser Issu was. At the conclusion of the historical section of the stele of Xian, which is dedicated to this General Issu, is written the following: 'The great benefactor, deputy commandant of the northern border provinces, the priest Issu, is generous and benevolent, he practises the way [religion] with enthusiasm. When the president of the great council, the honourable Guo Ziyi and prince of Fenyang, took over leadership of the army in the northern border provinces, Emperor Suzong gave him Issu as deputy. Issu served the prince tooth and nail; he was the eyes and ears of the army.' He divided his wealth among the worthy 'and each year gathered the monks of the four monasteries [of the capital]. He fed the hungry, clothed the cold, cared for the sick and buried the dead. He is of incomparable benevolence among the monks and the Enlightened Masters with the white garments.'[64]

The Nestorian priest and chorepiscopus Issu came from Balkh in modern Afghanistan and was of Iranian ancestry; his corresponding name was Yazdbozid. At that time it was not uncommon for members of the Nestorian and Buddhist clergy to hold political or military office. Issu was married – his son Adam wrote the text of the inscription – and thus belonged to the white clergy; the clergy, who wore black, by contrast, were celibate monks. Issu's son Adam, whose Chinese name was Qing Qing, was a monastic scholar and a prolific translator, to whom was attributed the translation of 30 Nestorian texts into Chinese, one or two of which have been preserved.[65] Qing Qing was such a linguistically gifted scholar that in 786 the renowned Indian Buddhist missionary Prajna asked him for help

with the translation of the Satparamita Sutra into Chinese. Since Qing Qing did not know Sanskrit, and Prajna did not know Chinese, a transitional translation was made into Persian or Uigur. Evidently the result was unsatisfactory, as the emperor denied the translation his imprimatur.[66] Suspicion may arise that the Nestorian's translation altered the Buddhist sutra in the direction of Christianity.

The epoch of Qing Qing coincided with the first zenith of the Nestorian metropolitan see of China. While the Church recruited its believers among the significant communities of Iranians, Sogdians, Turks and Uigurs, decisive success among the broader Chinese population remained elusive; for the Chinese, it was an alien religion. It remained, as before, dependent on the goodwill and foreign policy of those in power. This was revealed when in 840 the Kyrgyz drove the Uigurs – who were irreplaceable as a protecting power but hated nonetheless – out of their central Mongolian homeland. The Uigurs moved to eastern Turkistan and lost their dominant influence in the Middle Kingdom, thus robbing the Manichaeans of their patron. Emperor Wuzong (ruled 841–846) used the opportunity to ban Manichaeism from China and in 843 ordered that 'Manichaean books [shall] be confiscated, images shall be burnt and property shall be appropriated by the magistrates'. So 'all Manichaean monasteries should be closed and in the capital Manichaean nuns to the number of seventy were all killed'.[67] Two years later, for economic reasons, Wuzong, who was a committed Taoist and who paid for his quest for an alchemical elixir of immortality with a slow death by poisoning, extended the persecutions to Buddhism, as well as Nestorianism and Zoroastrianism, since they were both considered heretical sects of the teachings of the Buddha. In terms of content this assessment was understandable insofar as only Buddhism and the 'Persian religions' offered a perspective after death or actively concerned themselves with life after death, while Taoism and Confucianism paid this little heed. Perhaps the Tibetan king Langdarma also encouraged Emperor Wuzong to take this drastic step when he had all Buddhist monasteries in Tibet closed in 841/842 and nationalized their possessions and landholdings.[68]

The edict of 845 maintained: 'Human labour was wasted in the building of monasteries, the people's money was plundered for golden decorations, and marital relations damaged by ascetic strictures. With regard to the disobedience of national laws and harm to human beings, nothing is worse than Buddhism. If a farmer does not cultivate his field, others starve; if a woman abandons the raising of silkworms, others freeze to death. Now there are countless monks and nuns in the empire. They are all dependent on others for their food and clothing. After careful analysis of the examples of our ancestors, we have decided to put an end to this evil. In the whole of the empire, 4600 monasteries were destroyed, 265,000 monks and nuns were returned to the lay state and made subject to taxation. Over 40,000 hermitages were destroyed, and immeasurable amounts of fertile farmland were nationalized. And 150,000 slaves were freed.'[69] In contrast to the Nestorians, who, according to the stele of Xian, held no slaves, every Buddhist monastery possessed an average of 30 slaves. 'As far as the Ta Qin [Nestorian] and Muhu [Zoroastrian] religions are concerned, since Buddhism has already been cast out, these heresies must not alone be allowed to survive. People belonging to these are to be compelled to return to the world, belong again to their own districts and become taxpayers. As for foreigners, let them be sent back to their own countries. The [most probably Chinese] Ta Qin [Nestorian] and Muhu [Zoroastrian] monks to the number of more than 3000 are compelled to return to the world.'[70] These numbers reveal that Buddhism had a hundred times more monks, priests and nuns than did Christianity and Zoroastrianism combined.

Reconstruction of a silk temple banner of the early ninth century from Cave 17 in Dunhuang, China. The male figure wears four crosses: the first in his winged crown, the second on his clerical collar just above the pectoral cross, the third as a pectoral cross and the fourth on his ceremonial staff. The position of his right hand is taken from Buddhism; it is the vitarka mudra, which symbolizes the explanation of doctrine. The teaching figure represents Jesus Christ or a saint.[50]

Although upon his accession to the throne Emperor Xuanzong II (ruled 846/847–859) revoked his predecessor's edict and allowed a certain amount of reconstruction, Buddhism recovered only slowly in China, while Manichaeism and Nestorianism survived only on the western periphery of the empire in Kocho. The second half of the ninth century witnessed the collapse of state authority – palace eunuchs seized power, and rebellions flared up in every corner of the empire. Especially horrific was the rebellion of Huang Zhao, who captured the port city of Canton in 877/878 and there allegedly massacred 120,000 registered Muslims, Jews, Nestorians and Zoroastrians.[71] When the Tang dynasty fell in 907 trade with the West by land routes also collapsed as a consequence of the loss of internal security, and the previously regular contact with the patriarch in Baghdad ceased. When the patriarch sent six monks to China around 980 to take stock of the situation, they had to report that 'Christianity in China has become extinct. The native Christians have perished and their churches have been destroyed; there was only one Christian left in the land.'[72]

A dialogue with Buddhism and Taoism: between orthodoxy and syncretism

At the time of the Tang Dynasty, Nestorian Christianity in China faced a difficult task. Unlike the Western Church, which expanded by supplanting theologically weak religions (such as the Greco-Roman religion), by spreading among illiterate peoples (as in Germania and the British isles) or by receiving help from civil authorities, the Nestorian missionaries encountered a highly developed culture and three very vibrant religions or world-views, which were firmly anchored in the state and among the people. While Confucianism provided the state ideology and marked the machinery of society, Taoism permeated the self-conception of the people and enjoyed the support of the first Tang emperors. Buddhism, for its part, had reached Chang'an about a half a millennium before Alopen and, adopting elements of Taoism, spread rapidly throughout the Middle Kingdom.

How did Christianity, which originated in entirely different cultural circumstances, proceed theologically? Did it proclaim its message without mediation or compromise, did it seek to express its content to the desired audience in language they would understand, or did it, like Manichaeism, adapt itself chameleon-like to its new environment?[73] The answers may be sought in the few surviving Nestorian documents in the Chinese language. Besides the statement of faith of the stone stele, there are six scrolls. Four of these texts come from Cave 17 in Dunhuang,

sealed in 1036, as presumably the other two do as well. Two additional fragments are hotly disputed.[74] The documents recognized as authentic are:

1. *Book of Jesus, the Messiah*, presumably written by Alopen in 635–638.
2. *On the One God*, presumably written by Alopen in 641. The text consists of three parts:
   The parable,
   On the One Heaven,
   The Sermon of the Lord of the Universe.
3. The stone inscription of Xian, written by Qing Qing in 781.
4. *Book of Praise*, presumably written by Qing Qing around 780–800.
5. *Book of Venerable Men and Sacred Books*, 906–1036.
6. *Book of Mysterious Peace and Mysterious Joy*, before 1036.
7. *Book of the Origin of the Enlightening Religion of Ta Qin*, before 1036.

The two chief difficulties faced by Alopen and his successors were explaining the uniqueness of the Saviour Jesus Christ and selecting the target audience, since Buddhists, Taoists and Confucians could not be addressed with the same concepts. The idea that Christ, as God incarnate, was sacrificed in order to save human nature – essentially inclined to sin on account of Adam's fall – from eternal damnation was incompre-hensible in the Chinese context. Confucianism believed in the goodness of human nature and focused on living a proper life in the here and now. Buddhism and Taoism likewise proceeded from an optimistic picture of the human person, and they believed that all people could reach perfection by their own power or with varying amounts of help from bodhisattvas or immortals. For them suffering was founded in ignorance, which could, in principle, be overcome. Although East Syrian dogma, because of its rejection of original sin, could be flexible on this question, the idea of an omnipotent God sacrificing his beloved son remained a scandal. In Buddhist and Taoist thought, moreover, the principles of rebirth and karma contradicted those of a one-time resurrection and the act of faith. For their part, Confucians disapproved of Jesus's lack of respect for his mother (Matt 12:47ff.), his command to leave one's parents and his contempt for ancestor worship (Matt 8:22; Luke 14:26). Finally, in the tolerant environment of the Tang, Christianity's claim to the *only* path to salvation must have appeared alienating.

The *Book of Jesus, the Messiah* is the oldest Nestorian document in Chinese. It contains 2800 words and may have been written by Alopen after his arrival in Chang'an for the emperor or for the examining Office of Rites. The document first declares God's omnipresence and his role as the source of all life, then explains God's commandments and proceeds to the Gospel. This recounts in summarized but complete form the life of Jesus from incarnation to crucifixion. Unfortunately, the book breaks off in the middle of the text, and the description of the resurrection is missing. Right from the start, one is struck by the optimistic view that every person has in principle the possibility 'to have knowledge of the heavenly Lord [by] doing good and not following the evil way to hell'.[75] This belief anticipates the view of God of the mystic John of Dalyatha, who lived a century later. The author then interprets sin as the result of the misbehaviour of previous generations; he refers to the 'garden of fruits and animals' but not to Adam and Eve, and thus leaves room for a Buddhist interpretation, which attributes the evil that befalls us to the karma of past generations.[76] He then castigates the custom, widespread at the time of the Tang, of burying wooden and clay figures of camels, cows and horses alongside the dead.

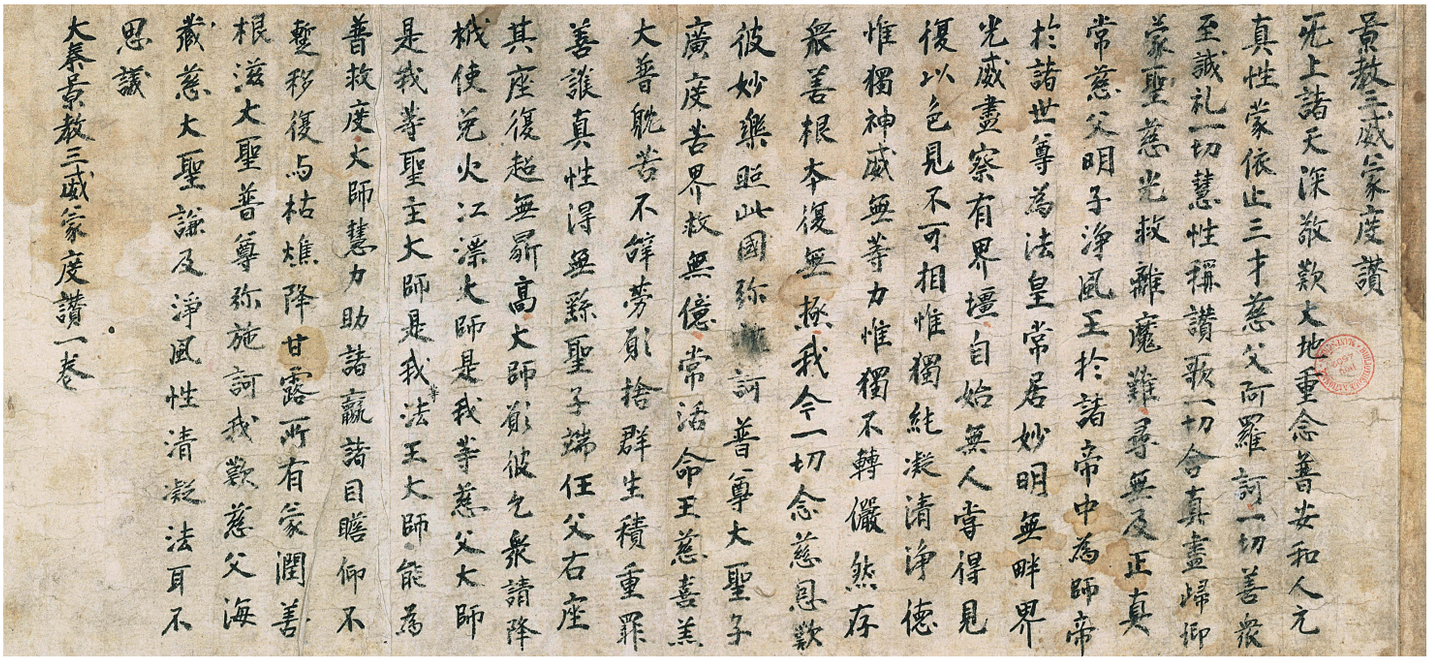
That Alopen wanted to gain the favour of the emperor and the Confucians is revealed

in his emphasis on the classic Chinese values of honouring emperor, parents and ancestors. 'These are the three most important commandments: first, serve the heavenly Lord; secondly, serve the emperor; and, thirdly, serve one's parents.' The fourth commandment adopted the foundation of Buddhism: 'Be merciful to all living creatures.'[77] The other Mosaic laws follow. In contrast to the later documents, Alopen did not hesitate to describe the crucifixion *expressis verbis*. On the whole, Alopen's first text represents a successful attempt to reconcile the Christian message with Confucian ethics and Buddhist principles.

In his second manuscript, *On the One God*, consisting of at least three parts, Alopen stresses the Gospel and the foundational principles of Christian doctrine; presumably these texts aided missionary efforts. In the first part, which has been preserved in fragments, the author clarifies the monotheistic position of Christianity.[78] After explaining the two worlds – the present world and the world to come – Alopen emphasizes that the human being must live virtuously and commendably in this earthly world. 'What the next world requires should be sown first in this world. All merits and virtues should be accomplished in this world, not in the world to come. Almsgiving as well as other virtues should be made in this world. In the next world, even though one wills to do it, it cannot be done. An evil heart, evil thoughts, evil repay and jealousy can only be eliminated in this world, not in the next world.'[79] With this urgent appeal Alopen acknowledged the Buddhist commandment to accumulate merit by living a virtuous life but unambiguously denied the possibility of numerous rebirths, which left open an endless period of time for amassing the necessary merit. The individual has not infinitely many chances, thanks to rebirths, to improve himself but, rather, only a single chance in this life. Saeki paraphrased Alopen's position as follows: 'This world is our only gate to heaven. We must enter into paradise whilst we are in this world.'[80]

With regard to the question of the imperfection of humanity, the author took full advantage of the leeway provided by Nestorian dogma. 'Man originally came from the God of goodness. Man had originally a good cause, but due to his ignorance he was tempted by the evil. He writes down what is good and evil, but he is still confused and lacks understanding.'[81] The human being is free to hear the universal teacher, Jesus, to learn the right path from him and to overcome his own ignorance. Thus did Alopen explain in terms understandable to Buddhists and Taoists Theodore of Mopsuestia's view, orthodox for the Church of the East, of the human tendency towards sin. It is, once again, fascinating to observe how the Nestorian mystic Rabban Yussuf, more than three centuries after Alopen, expressed in different words a position identical in content: 'The soul is by nature rational, mental and spiritual, like a polished and flawless mirror. Through the first sin, it was externally polluted but not in its nature. For the [original] sin was not so severe as to corrupt the nature of the soul; it could only effect an external, inessential staining.'[82]

Remaining consistent, the author concludes the second section of *On the One Heaven* with placating words: 'The One God wants from beginning to end all men to become holy.'[83] This conviction agrees completely with the apocata-stasis doctrine of the Nestorian mystic Isaac of Nineveh – a contemporary of Alopen. 'God did not abandon the devil and sinners at the moment of their fall. The demons will not remain demons, nor the sinners sinners. For God intends to lead them all to the same perfection in which the holy angels already are.'[84] These and subsequent examples demonstrate that the position of individual mystics, who fell under suspicion of heresy, was also supported by the official missionaries to China. For their part, these Chinese texts represent outstanding



The Nestorian hymn the Book of Praise *from c.780–800. The hymn, discovered in Dunhuang by Paul Pelliot in 1908 and written on paper in the Chinese language and script, is a glorification of the Trinity.*[51] *Interestingly, in the early 1990s four pages from a Nestorian Psalter, written in the Estrangela script, were also found in Dunhuang, in Cave B 53.*[52] *(Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Pelliot Ch. 3847, RCA 28578.)*

examples of an inculturation that managed to avoid syncretism.[85]

The third section, called *The Sermon of the Lord of the Universe*, is a revised and expanded version of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7), after which follow Jesus's passion, crucifixion and resurrection, as well as the advent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. We also find intimation of the Nestorian doctrine of the two natures of Christ: 'The Messiah was not God. He [God] became like man. This is the self-making of the Lord. The body of the Messiah died. This does not mean the end of his life.'[86] These somewhat unclear words were meant to express that the human nature of Christ died on the cross, but not the divine nature.

Let us now analyse the statement of faith on the stone stele of Xian in order to learn whether and to what extent the metropolitan see of China adapted itself to its powerful environment. The text begins with the calling of the Trinity as the Three-in-One. It proceeds with the story of creation and the saving work of Christ and ends with a description of the Christian life. At the beginning of creation, '[God] established the cross to determine the four directions',[87] which makes clear that God established the cross from the beginning of time as a cosmic sign. The cross thus symbolizes neither the crucifixion, which is not mentioned on the stele, nor the resurrection of Christ, but rather the omnipotence of God. A notable parallel to this position is found in the apocryphal Acts of John from the fourth century, known in the East in a Syriac and two secondary Arabic versions. 'This cross [is it] thus, which brought together everything through the Word.'[88]

The author Qing Qing then addresses the problem of sin. Like Alopen, Qing Qing recognizes no original sin; he underlines the fundamental goodness of human nature, but he shifts it closer to the Buddhist and Taoist idea of an original absence of desire. 'To the first man he [God] granted perfect harmony with himself. The nature [of man] was left in its original

state and did not swell up [with ambition], his pure heart knew no desires.' Taoists found in these words their own conviction, according to which the original man, who knew no desires, lived in perfect accord with the Tao. 'But Satan employed his arts of deception and embellished the pure nature with decoration.' Insofar as these adornments represent the product of satanic deceit, they must be the previously absent desires. Thus Qing Qing interprets sin as an error regarding the essence of existence, a false priority, an illusion. In this way he agrees with the Buddhists, who deduce the illusory character of our life from a fundamental delusion, from our ignorance.

These ideas very closely approach Taoism and Buddhism[89] and are certainly surprising for adherents of the Latin Church; but are they heretical in the context of the Church of the East? If one consults the Nestorian mystics, we believe not. John of Dalyatha described the perfect state of human nature unambiguously as the absence of human desires: 'Do you want the enjoyment of Christ to remain inflamed in your heart? Then chase away the enjoyment of the world. Christ will enter into your soul and live there if you have first emptied it of all that is worldly.'[90] Rabban Yussuf also described sin as the loss of spiritual purity, as an ignorance that 'besmirched the spotless mirror of the soul'.[91] Logically, for John of Dalyatha release from sin, understood as a gradual return to the original state, consisted in a succession of spiritual enlightenments in the form of conceptual insights – that is, the overcoming of ignorance.[92] Finally, there is the name *jing jiao, enlightening religion*, with which Christianity describes itself on the stele, in the tradition of the East Syrian mysticism of light, which was developed most clearly, again, by John of Dalyatha.[93] We see that numerous interpretations of the missionaries and theologians active in China appear at first glance syncretistic, but we find similar patterns of thought among Nestorian mystics of Mesopotamia.

In the best Nestorian tradition, the description of Christ follows: 'Then there appeared on earth in the form of a man the one person from the Three-in-One, the venerable and radiant Messiah, concealing his true eminence.' The human body of Christ served his divine nature as a shell – a formula to which the Church Father Theodore of Mopsuestia also subscribed. However, the text withheld the crucifixion and interpreted the resurrection as the general overcoming of death. The Messiah 'brought to completion the old [Mosaic] Law, which was established to regulate families and states, and proclaimed the new, inexpressible doctrine of the Holy Spirit from the Three-in-One, in order to lead [people] to a virtuous way of life in true faith. He established the rules of the eight stations [eight categories of blessedness from the Sermon on the Mount?], removed the impurities [of human nature] and re-established its sacred purity. He opened the gates of the three constant virtues [of faith, hope and mercy], opened the way to life and overcame death. He left behind 27 sacred books,[94] in which he explained the Great Reform, in order to open the [until now] closed door to spirituality.'[95] Here Christ appears as a divine teacher, who shows people the way to find the original state of their nature, which has been re-established by him, and to lead a spiritual life. With regard to Holy Scripture, the Old Testament had regulated domestic and societal relations by law, while the New Testament serves as instructions for moral perfection and personal spiritualization.

The recovery of the original purity of human nature also stands at the centre of the short hymn, *Book of Praise*, which may also have come from the quill of Qing Qing. In the language of Chinese poetry, the hymn praises the three hypostases of the Trinity and says of the Messiah: 'Who takes away the collected sins of all beings so that our true nature will be saved, no more peace to spoil.'[96] The conviction that Christ returned

Like the one depicting King David (page 174), the gold-plated silver platter of Verkhne-Nildino, made in the post-Sassanian style, was found along the the River Ob in western Siberia. It was kept in a small shamanistic shrine; the local people venerated it as the representation of important gods, to whom they sacrificed a horse and a calf every winter. The platter, measuring 23.7 cm in diameter, is nearly identical to a plate discovered in 1909 in the district of Perm, and it very likely came from the same mould. As with the plate showing King David, an origin in the Talas valley in far north-western Kyrgyzstan may be assumed, as well as a date from the ninth or tenth century.

On the plate are depicted ten heavily armed horsemen, who surround two fortresses, standing one in front of the other. As the plate features no inscription, interpretations of the image remain hypothetical. One version sees the scene as the conquest of Kushinagar. In this story, following the death of the Buddha Shakyamuni – whose body was cremated, with the urn containing his ashes placed in a stupa in the city of Kushinagar – seven neighbouring princes claimed their share of the sacred ashes and thus besieged and conquered Kushinagar. The second, more probable interpretation reads the scene as the siege of Jericho by King Joshua. In the upper right, the military commander Joshua, with his arm outstretched, stops the sun and the moon, visible above the upper citadel. In the window of the lower fortress is the maiden Rahab, who hid Joshua's messengers; in front of the upper fortress the Ark of the Covenant is being carried in the centre, and the seven priests are blowing the seven rams' horns, which will bring down the walls on the seventh day. (State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.)[53]

to human nature its original pure condition not only provided a bridge to Taoism and Buddhism but also runs as a leitmotif through East Syrian theology and reached its culmination in the Nestorian mysticism of the eighth to tenth centuries. John of Dalyatha, for instance, described the experience of God as a return of the human being to his original goodness,[97] and Rabban Yussuf likened the possibility of true spirituality, reopened by Christ, to the perfect purity of the mirror of the soul.[98] So it is revealed that the two leading Nestorian theologians of China, Alopen and Qing Qing, on the basis of their interpretations of the Good News, were not only able to initiate a dialogue with Taoism and Buddhism but also anticipated the flourishing of the Nestorian mysticism of Mesopotamia. That Qing Qing omitted the topic of the crucifixion is understandable within the Nestorian context and made the figure of Christ more accessible to the intended Chinese audience.

The final two[99] authentic documents, the *Book of Mysterious Peace and Mysterious Joy* and the short fragment of the *Book of the Origin of the Enlightening Religion of Ta Qin*, exude a different spirit from those previously discussed. In the first document, written on jute paper, an attempt is made to bring Buddhist and Taoist values and morals into agreement with Christian ideas and commandments. The form is taken from the question-and-answer dialogues between the historical Buddha Shakyamuni and his favourite student Ananda; here Jesus instructs Simon Peter. In reality this document represents the

opposite of the four orthodox texts of Alopen and Qing Qing: those offer Christian content in Taoist/Buddhist language, while this text presents Taoist/Buddhist content within a Christian framework.

In the dialogue Jesus answers Peter's question about the way of salvation. The first step towards peace and joy lies in the renunciation of desires and action. This instruction corresponds to the Chinese principle of *wu wei*, non-action, in order not to impede the law of the Tao. It plays a large role in both Taoism and Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism. After the author has listed concrete examples of non-action, he founds its necessity on the avoidance of bad family karma – again, a Buddhist idea. First Jesus explains positive karma: 'You [Simon] can ask me about the way to success [salvation] because your fathers and relatives of the former generations have done many good things which have been transferred to you.'[100] Conversely, past impure desires hamper a sick man's spiritual development. Non-action, however, provokes no bad karma and leads to inner peace and spiritual composure. The steps leading to non-action are the *ten meditations*, whose goal is to dissolve our attachments to ourselves, our families and material goods, which likewise correspond to Buddhist thought. In conclusion Jesus teaches the *four paths to success*, which correspond to wu wei. They are non-desire, non-action, non-virtue (absence of pride) and non-judgement.[101]

Both the goal of inner peace and the methods leading to it stand in essence closer to Taoism/Buddhism than to Christianity; God is no longer the personal and active God of the Bible but, rather, corresponds to the impersonal and passive Tao, and Jesus appears as an embodiment of Buddha or Lao-tzu. Symbolically speaking, the rightly lived life represents the movement from the riverbank of our transitory human existence to the opposite bank of permanence and eternity. In Buddhism the Buddha acts as ferryman, as Christ does in Christianity. Only when Jesus speaks of himself do purely Christian ideas appear: 'I am in all heaven and on all earth. No matter if they are the same kind or different kinds, the knowledgeable or the ignorant, I protect and support all good [human beings] and release [save] all who deserve punishment.'[102] While Jesus's role with regard to those people who have accumulated much merit and know the way to salvation resembles that of a helpful bodhisattva or Taoist immortal, the ignorant with bad karma need his salvific power – that is, divine grace. The extent to which this text is representative of developments of the time remains an open question.

Now the question arises of whether Nestorianism influenced its environment at that time. In the case of Confucianism, to which Christianity was entirely foreign, certainly not. As far as Taoism and Buddhism are concerned, however, there are a few surprising parallels, but hardly influence. For instance, Taoism in the Tang period was familiar with a kind of divine trinity of the *Three Purities*. It consisted of the *Heavenly First Worthy*, also called the *good father*; the *Highest Lord Tao*; and the *Highest Lord Lao*, Lao-tzu. In this context Lao-tzu is the embodied Tao, who took on a body out of compassion for suffering humanity, in order to help them. This idea, which can be found before the year 635, developed not out of Christianity but out of Mahayana Buddhism. The same observation may be made of the Taoist tradition called *benji jing*, according to which the *Heavenly First Worthy* was embodied as a Taoist ascetic and out of compassion for humanity suffered countless torments and death in limbo. This text also existed before 635; its model was the popular *Jataka* stories, which tell of the previous lives of Buddha Shakyamuni. Influence on Taoism by Christianity appears to be excluded.[103] As for Buddhism, there are a few similarities between the Christian doctrine of salvation and that of

the Buddhist *Pure Land* school, which places faith in the mercy of Amitabha at the centre of its doctrine. In this case, however, Christian influence is improbable, since the first monastery of this school, which originated in India, was founded in China in 402.[104] Christianity was presumably too weak to leave any mark on the great religions of China.

Finally, the question remains: why did the enlightening religion disappear in China? There are many answers, which build on each other. One factor emerges from the dependence of the Chinese metropolitan see on the favour of the rulers and, as was later the case with Buddhism in India, of their own monasteries. The Nestorian community was small in numbers and consisted in considerable part of non-Chinese merchants. In addition, Christianity only took a weak hold among the Chinese people in selected urban centres and thus remained vulnerable to repressions and pogroms. Moreover, until the ninth century Christianity was considered not an independent religion but a Buddhist sect. The geographical isolation of the Christians of China from the Mesopotamian centre certainly played a role as well.

Besides these external reasons, there were also internal factors. In China Christianity encountered three highly developed world-views, whose ideas were deeply imprinted on the Chinese soul. Fundamental differences were revealed between Christian monotheism and the all-encompassing perspective of Buddhism or Taoism. Christianity is marked by the dual belief in the absolute good, God, and the evil that is to be overcome. The good is locked in a struggle with the evil and will triumph at the end of time. With the apocalypse time comes to a standstill; human beings will be sent for ever either to paradise or to hell. However, the ideas of a radical distinction between good and evil and of linear, finite time are alien to the East Asian mind. In its holistic view of the world, the terms 'good' and 'evil' are not absolute but relative. Buddhist and Taoist folk religion recognizes countless deities, which are well or ill-disposed towards humanity but not fundamentally good or evil. They are good if people obey the commandments and rituals, evil if they disregard these, in which case the angered deities are appeased by a ritual of atonement. The East Asian deities really form barriers for human behaviour. Buddhism and Confucianism are not creeds but ethics. In the East Asian cyclical understanding of time, good is transformed into evil and vice versa; it is governed by, to use a metaphor of Nietzsche, the 'eternal return of the same'. In such thought structures, there is no room for ideas such as sin against God, salvation, a single God and apocalypse.

IX The Period of the Mongols

Shamanism and religious syncretism among the Turko-Mongolian peoples

The Church of the East came into contact with the Turkic and Mongol peoples quite early.[1] First towards the end of the fifth or in the sixth century with the White Huns, then less than a century later with some Western Turks; further conversions of Turkic tribes followed in 644 and in the early 780s", whereupon a small minority of the Uigurs adopted East Syrian Christianity. In 1007 East Syrian missionaries made a real breakthrough with the conversion of the khan of the Keraits and his people. According to the historians Mari ibn Suleiman and Bar Hebraeus, the ruler of the Turks respectively of the Kerait,[2] whose homeland stretched from modern central Mongolia to the south into the Gobi Desert, lost his way while hunting in a snowstorm and wandered about in confusion. Then St Sargis appeared to him in a vision and promised to save him, if he would have himself baptized. The rescued khan consulted Nestorian merchants, who were staying in his camp, about this and asked the metropolitan of Merv, Odisho, for baptism. Odisho sent a priest and a deacon, who promptly baptized the khan and 200,000 Turks or Kerait, adapted the fasting regulations to Mongol customs, and allowed the khan to bless mare's milk with the cross on the altar and all present to drink from it. In this way the Church of the East demonstrated its flexibility in questions of liturgy and its acceptance of inculturation.[3] The prince who served as priest was later one of the models for the mythic figure of Prester John.

At that time the Turko-Mongolian peoples worshipped the sky or the god of the sky, called *Tengri* (for which reason their religion is also called Tengrism) as well as numerous natural phenomena such as mountains and the points of the compass. The shaman – called *qam* among the Turkic peoples – served as mediator between human beings and the spirits, the personifications of natural phenomena. Although Tengrism also included ideas about the afterlife in the world to come, to which the shamans would lead the soul, the actions of the shamans concentrated on influencing good and evil spirits in coping with everyday life.[4] Thus shamanistic Tengrism did not necessarily consider as rivals other religions that were strongly oriented towards the world to come, as long as they avoided absolute religious claims. Religious tolerance was expressly declared in the 1206 law codex of Genghis Khan: 'All religions shall be respected; none shall be preferred to the others.'[5] In the same spirit the Great Khan Möngke (ruled 1251–1259) expressed his view to the Franciscan William of Rubruk (c. 1215–1295) on the eve of Pentecost Sunday in

1254: 'We Mongols believe that there is only one God [the sky god Tengri], in whom we live and die, and to him we direct our whole hearts. But, as God gave the hand several fingers, so he gave human beings several ways to achieve blessedness.'[6] Möngke's call for tolerance was also based on the fact that the claim to absoluteness is alien to a folk religion tied to a certain people, while it is the basis for universal religions.

But the religious tolerance of Mongol Tengrism ended where the claim to absolutness of monotheistic religions led to the disparagement of other religions. First, before the start of a great religious disputation, which took place in 1254 in his presence among shamanists, Buddhists, Muslims, Nestorians and Rubruk, Great Khan Möngke had the following rule proclaimed: 'He [Möngke] orders that, under pain of death, no one shall dare to use quarrelsome or injurious words against the other party.'[7] Second, the tolerant spirit of shamanism rejected the accusations that its belief in the spirits was a reprehensible superstition. Thus, in the long term Buddhism, whose popular form showed aspects of polytheism and which had no problem adopting foreign deities into its pantheon, stood closer to the nomadic Mongols than did monotheistic faiths such as Christianity and Islam with their claims to absolutness. On the other hand, over time many of the settled Turkic peoples bowed to the absolute claims of the teachings of Mohammed, which also spread with the help of the sword, and were Islamicized. The lack today of Christian architectural evidence within the geographical area of the Turko-Mongol peoples is explained by the fact that the nomads had mobile tent churches, while the churches of the settled Christians were destroyed by the subsequent Muslim rulers.

Because of the tolerance of the Turko-Mongolian peoples and the flexibility of the Nestorian missionaries, these peoples could accept Christianity without abandoning their

A copper amulet, measuring 5 x 5 cm, from the Ordos, Inner Mongolia. The amulet is typical of the religious syncretism of the thirteenth/ fourteenth centuries, as it combines symbols from two religions: the Christian cross and the Buddhist swastika. However, since many of these so-called Ordos-crosses were bought in the antique market, they lack stratigraphic context and their provenance remains doubtful. Furthermore, similar looking copper seals have appeared in the art dealers' market which allegedly stem from Afghanistan and are tentatively attributed to the Bactriana-Margiana Archaeological Complax dating 2300/200-1500 BCE. [53a]

customs. The ancient Mongol belief in the omnipotent sky god Tengri paved the way for the monotheistic idea of belief in the one God. On the other hand, Christian symbols mutated into protective amulets that were also worn by non-Christians. The best-known examples are the more than 1000 so-called *Ordos-crosses* that were found in the region of the Öngüt Mongols in the Chinese provinces of Ningxia and Inner Mongolia. About two-thirds of these small metal amulets are really cruciform, but the others are either decorated with other symbols such as swastikas or represent geometric patterns and birds.[8]

In the case of Christian-Mongolian syncretism, the question arose of how many liturgical compromises could be granted without betraying or at least seriously diluting the essence of the Christian spirit. While belief in the efficacy of amulets was relatively harmless and widespread even within Christian praxis, the matter of lavish burial rituals was more contentious. The 676 synod of Patriarch Giwargis I (in office 661–680) had already condemned the addition of heathen burial rituals to Christian funerals. 'Christian dead shall be buried in the Christian

Camel caravan in the desert of Khongorin Els, southern Gobi, Mongolia. This desert formed the southern border of the Kerait, the majority of whom were Nestorian.

not the heathen manner. For it is a heathen custom to shroud the dead in choice, luxurious garments.'[9] Nonetheless, Rubruk observed among the Mongols burials that could no longer be reconciled with Christianity. 'In the case of one who had recently died, I saw that they had hung around the grave, between tall poles, 16 horsehides, four towards each direction of the compass. They also provided mare's milk to drink and meat to eat, and they declared that he had been baptized.'[10] Although the Church of the East used natives to fulfil the functions only of priests and deacons, and bishops came from Mesopotamia or Iran and were correspondingly educated, the enormous distances hindered the maintenance of orthodox rituals. Since individual nomadic tribes were visited by their bishop only once every few years or once a decade, it is not surprising that some Turko-Mongol Christians were more closely oriented to their old customs, and Christian doctrine was reduced to a vague concept of the afterlife.

Nestorian Turkic and Mongol peoples

The Kerait

The Kerait, who, according to Bar Hebraeus converted around 1007, and became under the leadership of Toghril Khan (r. with interruptions 1165/71–1203) in the late twelfth century the most powerful Mongol people, remained Nestorians,

at least among the nobility. A few rulers, who called themselves *Gur Khan*, 'Universal Khan', adopted Christian names. Thus Toghril's grandfather was called Marghuz – that is, Mark. At that time Marghuz fought the Tatar people and the northern Chinese empire of the Jin (1115–1234), a people of Manchurian ancestry, for rule over eastern Mongolia. Marghuz fell into the hands of the Tatars, who handed him over to the emperor of the Jin. The emperor mocked the Christian king in an especially cruel fashion, having him nailed with long nails to a wooden donkey – a contemptuous allusion to Palm Sunday.[11] Marghuz's grandson Toghril later avenged his ancestor when, together with his protégé and ally Genghis Khan (whose father Jesügei had also been poisoned by the Tatars in 1176) he destroyed the Tatars in three battles between 1196 and 1202. The nobles were massacred and the common people sold into slavery.[12] Khan Marghuz's son, Toghril's father, also bore a Christian name, Cyriacus († c. 1165/71), Qurjaquz in Mongolian.[13] When Qurjaquz died, Toghril rebelled against his uncle, murdered all his brothers and, thanks to his blood brotherhood with Jesügei, Genghis Khan's father, established himself as ruler of the Kerait.

It is not widely known that the eventual world conqueror Genghis Khan (c. 1167–1227), whose personal name was Temüjin, was for a long time a vassal of the Nestorian Gur Khan Toghril.[14] After the Tatars poisoned Temüjin's father Jesügei and his followers deserted him and his mother, he placed himself under the protection of his father's former ally, Toghril Khan. At that time the prince's camp was located south-east of the present capital, Ulan Bator, where magnificently dressed Nestorian priests read the Mass in a tent chapel and on special occasions censed and blessed the Gur Khan in this chapel. Toghril renewed with Temüjin the mutual assistance pact he had concluded with his father and promised to help him win back his position as the chief of his tribe. Thanks to Toghril's military aid, Temüjin prevailed, after which, in 1185 or 1189, a few Mongol tribes declared him khan.[15] When the Naiman people, who were also Nestorian and who lived to the west of the Kerait, drove out Toghril Khan, Genghis Khan showed his gratitude. He conquered the Naiman and in 1196 helped Toghril to regain the throne. Now Toghril Khan was again the most powerful Mongol prince and could hope, with Genghis Khan's support, to become the acknowledged ruler of all the Mongol peoples. Thus developed the vision of unifying the Turko-Mongol peoples, of whom at least seven were more or less Nestorian, into a Nestorian empire under the leadership of a Christian ruler.[16] Since some 30 to 40 per cent of the Turko-Mongols living between Lake Balchasch in eastern Kazakhstan and Manchuria were Nestorian, this idea was entirely conceivable.

The great spread of Christianity among the Turko-Mongol peoples, who lived so far from Baghdad, bears witness to the indomitable and also systematic missionary spirit of the Church of the East. The missionaries, skilled in foreign languages, had not only to convert new believers but also to reinforce Christians in their faith. In this regard the Syriac liturgical language served as the mortar necessary to maintain the unity of the faith community. However, the status of Christianity remained weak, since it did not control a homogeneous region and since the Christian faith remained syncretistic with numerous shamanist beliefs.

That the powerful Toghril Khan provided one of the background figures for the myth of Prester John, the mysterious Christian ruler in the Far East, is revealed by the travel report of Marco Polo, in which he equates the Kerait prince with the presbyter John.[17] But Mongolia was too small for the two khans, and in 1203/1204 Genghis Khan overthrew his one-time patron Toghril Khan – the fleeing Toghril was killed by a Naiman.

Two years later, in 1206, at an assembly held on the River Onon in eastern Mongolia, Genghis Khan had himself declared *Kha Khan*, Ruler of all Rulers. Now Genghis Khan dismantled the structures of the traditional tribal relations by dividing the people according to the decimal system into groups of one thousand, made up of members of different tribes and peoples, and assigned their leadership to deserving officers. Thus did Genghis Khan unify the approximately two dozen Turko-Mongol tribes, who numbered about one to 1.5 million people, into the Mongol nation, under the leadership of a military aristocracy. By assigning to each group of one thousand and its higher grouping of ten thousand a specific area in which to live, he limited the mobility of the nomads and transformed their innate tendency to move from place to place into an invincible military machine.[18] The adherence to a religion, however, which earlier was closely bound up with tribal membership, became in this way a private matter.

After his victory over the Kerait, Genghis Khan integrated them into his Mongol tribes. He took as his wife a Nestorian niece of Toghril, Ibaka-Beki, and married her younger sister Bektumish-Beki to his eldest son Jöchi and her youngest sister Sorqaqtani-Beki to his youngest son Tolui (†1232). Thanks to these marital alliances, Christianity gained entrance into the family of the world conqueror. The Nestorian Sorqaqtani (†1252) became the most influential Mongol princess, as she was the mother of the Mongol Great Khan Möngke (ruled 1251–1259), of the Great Khan and later emperor of China Kublai Khan (ruled 1260–1294) and of the Il-Khan of Iran, Hülägü (ruled 1256–1265). Following the death of Great Khan Güyük, she succeeded in mounting a palace coup by supplanting the line of the clan of Ögödei with that of Tolui, which she herself led, thus enabling the election of Möngke.[19]

The Oirat, Merkit and Manchurians

To the north of the Keraits lived two additional peoples, among whom Nestorian Christianity was once present. One of these peoples was the Oirat, whose homeland lay south-west of Lake Baikal, who submitted to Genghis Khan in 1208. Two centuries later, with the aid of the Chinese, the Oirats conquered Mongolia in 1434 and broke the hold of Genghis Khan's descendants on Mongolia.[20] The other people was the strongly turkicized Mongol people called the Merkit, who made their home south-east of Lake Baikal. The destiny of Genghis Khan was closely bound up with them, since Temüjin's mother was a Merkit who had been abducted from a Merkit leader by Jesügei. As revenge, Merkit later abducted Temüjin's first bride, Börte, whom he was able to win back with the help of Toghril. From then on Genghis Khan considered the Merkit, like the Tatars, to be his arch-enemies. In 1204/1205 he twice defeated the Merkit, who had allied themselves with the likewise Nestorian Naiman, and conquered their fortress Taikal, which lay to the south of the modern city of Ulan Ude. He gave the wife of the Merkit khan's son, Töregene, to his third-eldest son Ögödei as a wife, who later gave birth to the future Great Khan Güyük. But Güyük was no Christian as two Nestorian messengers had erroneously reported to King Louis IX of France (see p. 213). As the Franciscan John of Plano Carpini (1182–1252), who met Güyük in the autumn of 1246 at Karakorum, reported, the Great Khan was surrounded by Nestorians; a Nestorian tent chapel stood before his yurt.[21] In 1205 the majority of the Merkit submitted. A minority, however, moved to the west into the region north of Lake Balchasch in modern Kazakhstan, where Genghis Khan's most experienced field commander, Sübütai, annihilated them in 1216.[22]

Far to the east of Lake Baikal lived a Tungus-Manchurian people, who were also Nestorian.

The Nestorian prince Nayan, who ruled over Manchuria and rebelled against Kublai Khan in 1287, is surprised in bed by the advancing army of Kublai Khan. (Illustrated manuscript of Marco Polo's Book of the Wonders of the World *from 1412. Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. Ms. fr. 2810, fol. 34. RCC 18438.)*

Marco Polo reported that its ruler, Prince Nayan, who was a distant cousin of Kublai Khan, rose up against his uncle, the emperor of China, in 1287. The Nestorian rebel appears to have been so powerful that the 72-year-old Kublai Khan personally set out for Manchuria, which he reached after twenty forced marches. Here he encountered the army of Prince Nayan, whose standard displayed the cross, for 'Nayan was baptized and bore the cross on his banner. But that did not help him', as Kublai Khan won victory, took Nayan prisoner, and had him executed.[23] Many gravestones preserved in Manchuria testify to the presence of the Church of the East in a region that lay more than 7000 kilometres, as the crow flies, from the patriarchal see.[24]

Marco Polo continued: 'After the defeat the Buddhists and Muslims couldn't help but mock the Christians on account of the cross on Nayan's standard: *Just look how the cross of your God helped Nayan, a true servant of Christ!* [When Kublai Khan learned of this] he sharply rebuked them: *The cross properly did not help Nayan, since he was a nefarious traitor who rebelled against his ruler and deserved his fate. The cross of your God did good by not helping him oppose justice.*'[25] It speaks to the religious tolerance of the Mongols that Kublai Khan, who personally inclined towards Buddhism, did not bear a grudge against the Christians for this betrayal by a Christian vassal.

Kublai Khan's magnanimity is all the more surprising given that earlier one of the princes

The city walls of Olon Sume-in Tor, Inner Mongolia, China. Olon Sume-in Tor was the capital of the majority Nestorian Öngüt, whose ruling family also belonged to the Church of the East. Since the king was also a bishop, he united secular and spiritual authority. In the 1930s and 1940s archaeologists found in the city many Nestorian gravestones, as well as the badly damaged ruins of a Nestorian church and of the Catholic Cathedral of Montecorvino, built in the Gothic style after 1295.[54]

who was closely associated with the Nestorians had contested his right to the throne. The case concerned his younger brother Arikböge, another son of the Nestorian Sorqaqtani, who Rubruk implied was a Christian.[26] Arikböge fought a four-year civil war with the help of a group of powerful Nestorians. Among these were the former imperial chancellor and finance minister of Möngke, Bulgai, as well as Möngke's chief wife, Kutuktei, whose baptism Rubruk believed he had witnessed.[27] When Arikböge surrendered in 1264, Kublai placed him under house arrest until his death in 1266, while he had Bulgai executed.[28] Once again the Church of the East suffered the misfortune of being on the side of the loser in a political conflict.

The Öngüt

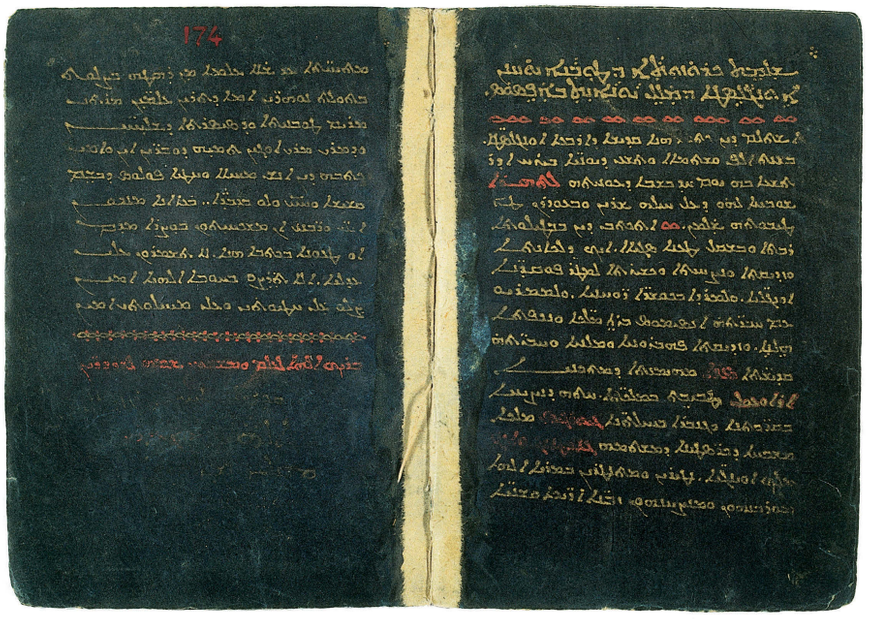
With regard to the Turkic people of the Öngüt, the Church of the East stood on the side of the victors. The Öngüt, whose homeland lay on both sides of the great northern bow of the Yellow River in the eastern sections of the present provinces of Inner Mongolia and Ningxia and who were in large part Nestorian, positioned themselves from the very beginning on the side of Genghis Khan. Because they lived between the Great Wall of China and the eastern part of the Gobi Desert, they were of exceptional strategic importance for both the northern Chinese empire of the Jin and the emerging Mongol power, and for this reason the Jin had allied themselves with them as guardians of the Great

The Pagoda of the Complete Huayan Sutra, popularly known as Bei Ta, White Pagoda, built between 983 and 1031, near Hohhot, Inner Mongolia. In the thirteenth/fourteenth centuries, the town predecessing Hohhot belonged to the kingdom of the Öngüt and served at times as the winter residence of the Nestorian king. This accounts for the several Nestorian inscriptions from the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) found inside the Buddhist pagoda.[55]

Wall. But when war broke out in 1204 between the Mongols of Genghis Khan and the equally powerful Naiman, and the prince of the Naiman asked the Öngüt to attack Genghis Khan from the rear, the Nestorian king Alaquch-tägin decided in favour of Genghis Khan and sent him an envoy named Yuhunan (John), who warned him of the Naiman attack. Alaquch-tägin paid for his changed allegiance with his life, as a few of his chieftains, who would have preferred an alliance with the Naiman, murdered him.[29]

Seven years later, in the summer of 1211, the Öngüt opened the door to China for the advancing Genghis Khan by allowing him to cross the Great Wall without opposition. Genghis Khan did not forget Alaquch-tägin's help; he placed his widow on the Öngüt throne and married her young son Poyao Ho to his daughter Alakhai-Beki. After Poyao Ho's death Alakhai ruled the land with an iron hand, and, as she herself was childless, she married two of her stepsons into the ruling Mongol families: Künbuka with Güyük's eldest daughter and Aibuka with Kublai Khan's youngest daughter, and Aibuka's son Görgüz (George) first with Kublai Khan's granddaughter and then with the daughter of the crown prince Timur (ruled 1294–1307). No one was bound so closely through marriage with the Mongol imperial house as was the Nestorian ruling family of the Öngüt.[30] When the Nestorian monks Rabban Bar Sauma and his student Markos – the future patriarch Mar Yahallaha III (in office 1281–1317) – set off in 1278/1279 from their hermitage near Khan Baliq (Beijing) on a pilgrimage via the land route to Jerusalem, they travelled first to the Öngüt Empire, the homeland of the young Markos. Markos, born in 1245, was the son of the Nestorian archdeacon of the then northern capital of Kwashang (Olon Sume-in Tor), which lay about 130 kilometres north of Hohhot in Inner Mongolia.[31] The travel report written in the early fourteenth century by a close friend of the future patriarch maintains: 'When the people of the city and parents of Rabban Markos heard that these two monks had come, they welcomed them with gladness and delight and they escorted them with great honour to the church. And when the report of the arrival of the two monks reached the rulers Künbuka and Aibuka, they had them brought to their camp', where they were given lavish gifts.[32]

Aibuka was followed on the Öngüt throne by his son Görgüz, who, as a loyal vassal of the Yuan emperors Kublai Khan and Timur, quelled numerous uprisings. In 1294 Timur granted him the title of prince, and in 1298 he was taken prisoner by the Chagataiid khan Du'a and executed. As prince of a compact, unconquered people, as military commander in a strategically



Colophon of a manuscript written in gold ink on blue-coloured paper. It belongs to an abbreviated Gospel book, based on the Peshitta, and is written in the Syriac language and Nestorian script. The colophon states that the book, measuring 18 x 13 centimetres and completed in March 1298, was written for 'Sara, the believer, famous among the queens, sister of the illustrious among the warriors and hero among the combatants, George, the glorious king of the Christians, king of the Öngüt'. The book, written in Mesopotamia, never reached Queen Sara, and was kept until 1950 in the library of the Chaldean archdiocese of Amida (Diyarbakir) and since then in the Vatican Library. (Ms. Vat. Syr. 622, 173 v-174.)[56]

important buffer region between the capital Khan Baliq and the Mongolian heartland, and as son-in-law of two emperors, the Nestorian Görgüz was a powerful and politically influential individual. Marco Polo was also impressed by him: 'King George is of the lineage of Prester John. It is the custom that these kings always obtain to wife either daughters of the Great Khan or other princesses of his family. The rulers are Christians, but there are also many Idolaters [Buddhists] and Mohammedans. King George is the sixth successor to Prester John.' Marco Polo further describes how King George, together with one of Kublai's sons, defeated the rebel Kaidu in a great battle.[33] Of course, Marco Polo erred insofar as he traced George back to the Kerait prince Toghril, whom he equated with Prester John, since the two lines were not related to one another.

It is an irony of history that the only concrete result of the European journey of Rabban Bar Sauma was the endangering of the position of the Church of the East in China! After Rabban Bar Sauma told Pope Nicolas IV in Rome in 1288 about the existence of many Christians among the natives, the pope sent the Franciscan missionary and bishop John of Montecorvino (1247–1328) there around 1291. While the Franciscans Carpini and, to a lesser degree, Rubruk, who had visited the Mongol Empire earlier, were there primarily as diplomatic envoys and refrained from missionary activity, Montecorvino travelled for the sake of missionary work to Khan Baliq, which he reached in 1294.[34] He was the first Catholic priest to visit China – exactly 659 years after the Nestorian Alopen. Thus began the tragic spectacle that lasted until the second half of the twentieth century: the Catholic Church advanced into regions with Nestorian Christian populations and there directed their missionary efforts primarily not towards the so-called heathens but rather towards the East Syrians. Instead of supporting the Church of the East that had been established there, the Catholic Church infiltrated the Christian communities by setting up parallel hierarchies based on the argument of universal papal authority.

The Church of the East got a foretaste of this when Montecorvino courted and soon 'converted' to Catholicism the then most powerful Nestorian in China, King George, and had a Catholic church constructed alongside the Nestorian church in Olon Sume. Thanks to George's protection, he built another church in Beijing in 1299, and a third followed the next year. In a letter to the pope of 8 January 1305 he complained first about 'the Nestorians, who are Christians in name only' and who hindered him in his work. Then he boasted that he had baptized 6000 people, and for the school 'I bought one after the other forty boys, the sons of pagans, and then baptized them' – a missionary practice still used in the twenty-first century.[35] Finally he emphasized the conversion of the Öngüt king: 'Concerning the good King George, from the school of Nestorian Christians, he was converted by me to the truth

Nestorian gravestone from Olon Sume, Museum of Beilingmiao, Inner Mongolia, China. The inscription in the Turkish language and Syriac script records the name of the deceased. It reads: 'This is the grave of Awgin the Priest.'

of the true Catholic faith. He brought over a great part of his people to the true Catholic faith and built a beautiful church. And this King George departed to the Lord six years ago [1298/1299] as a true Christian. He left a son and heir in the cradle who is nine years old. But King George's brothers, since they were perfidious persons in the errors of Nestorius, subverted after the king's death all whom had converted [to Catholicism], leading them back to their former schism. And the son of the aforementioned king [George] bears my name; I hope that he will copy his father's footsteps.'[36]

Pope Clement V (†1314) was delighted and in 1307 named Montecorvino archbishop of Khan Balik, although Khan Balik had been a Nestorian metropolitan see since 1248. At the same time he sent seven bishops, three of whom reached Beijing in 1308.[37] With the duplication of the hierarchies, Rome entered into open rivalry with the Church of the East, bringing an abrupt end to the Nestorians' goodwill towards their European brothers in the faith. That the Catholic missionaries of the time condemned the East Syrians as heretics is evident from, for instance, the report of the archbishop of Sultanyie in Iran, John of Cora. Around 1330 he wrote, 'He [Archbishop Montecorvino] would have converted the whole country [China] to the Christian and Catholic faith if the Nestorians, false Christians and miscreants, had not hindered him.' He then described the Nestorians as follows: 'The Nestorians [are] schismatic Christians. These Nestorians are more than thirty thousand in China and are very rich people. They have very beautiful and orderly churches with crosses and images in honour of God and of the saints.'[38] The intra-Christian rivalries did not go unnoticed in China. They put off the Mongol upper classes, while the Chinese regarded both Churches as foreign; the Church of the East was considered Mongol, even if also Asian, but the Catholic Church was seen as the Trojan horse of alien powers.

Montecorvino's report is historically accurate. After King George's death the nobility, under the leadership of his brother John, returned to the Church of the East, and his son John, who had

been baptized by Montecorvino, died in 1312 or 1314.[39] Soon thereafter the Church began to lose believers among the Öngüt, as in the empire as a whole. As a consequence of a general Chinese influence taking hold in the Mongol ruling class, Christian Öngüt converted to Confucianism, Taoism or Buddhism.[40] As in all of China, Christianity disappeared shortly after the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in 1368. Surprisingly, around 1930 among the Mongol tribe of the Erküt, in the region of the Ordos, A. Mostaert encountered religious ideas that clearly accorded with Nestorian Christianity, although the Erküt who were questioned were unaware of this connection.[41]

Since the Öngüt were in part settled and involved in trade, they built cities, among them the northern capital of Olon Sume-in Tor, the ancient Kwashang, and the southern near present Hohhot. While the latter remained occupied after the fall of the Yuan Dynasty, Olon Sume was abandoned after the repeated destructions by the new dynasty of the Ming (1368–1644), with the exception of a brief resettlement at the end of the sixteenth century. The city centre of Olon Sume, which had been surrounded by a clay wall, is partially preserved as ruins. Within the 960×570-metre-wide and as much as 5-metre-high wall, many large piles of bricks and numerous pieces of green- and yellow-glazed roof tiles lie atop several foundations made of solid stone or brick. Archaeologists have identified the ruins of the royal palace, a Buddhist temple, the great Nestorian church and the Catholic church of Montecorvino, built in 1295, with a cruciform layout and tiles decorated in the Gothic style with a relief pattern of flowers. The poor preservation of the buildings may also be attributed to the fact that the Buddhist monastery of Beling Miao, thirty kilometres away, was constructed out of bricks from Olon Sume. Many stone monoliths found both within the environs of the Nestorian church and outside the city walls and bearing one or more Maltese crosses attest to the Christian past of Olon Sume. In contrast to the grave markers of Kyrgyzstan, which were unworked but naturally polished river stones or boulders, or the altar-like steles and structures resembling sarcophagus lids found in southern China, those of Olon Sume resembled coffins. On the upper long side they bore short inscriptions in the Turkish language and East Syriac script, and the remaining sides were often adorned with garlands or floral patterns. The discovery of additional dozens of gravestones in several ruins, as much as seventy kilometres from Olon Sume, as well as the widely distributed crosses from the Ordos, indicate that Christianity was at that time widespread among the Öngüt and not restricted merely to the urban nobility.[42]

The Naiman, Uigurs and Tangut

To the west of the Kerait there stretched from western Mongolia to eastern Kazakhstan the homeland of the Naiman, a confederation of eight Turko-Mongol tribes.[43] The Naiman were partly Nestorians, too, although the shamans also exercised great influence among them.[44] After the defeat of the Kerait, the Naiman were the sole remaining independent power in Mongolia. Genghis Khan controlled the north-east and the Christian Naiman the south-west. Like a magnet they drew the tribes that had been conquered by Genghis Khan, as long as they had not submitted. The decisive battle took place in 1204 near the future Karakorum, where Genghis Khan destroyed the Naiman army. The prince of the Naiman fell, and only his son Küchlüg could escape. The Mongols went to war against him again 14 years later.

Also among the prisoners was Tatatunga, the Uigur keeper of the seal of the fallen Naiman king, as the Naiman had adopted the Uigur script. The Uigur script had developed out of

Just as he would have a thousand years ago, a Mongolian horseman captures horses with a noose attached to a four-metre-long pole. Central Mongolia belonged to the grazing lands of the Keraites and Naiman, who were, in part, Nestorian.

the Sogdian, which, like Syriac, was derived from the Aramaic consonant alphabet. Uigur was originally written horizontally from right to left, but under influence from Chinese it began to be written vertically from top to bottom. Also an influence by the vertical spelling of ancient Syriac is possible, since it was used in the Levant for stone inscriptions and painted labellings on walls.[45] Genghis Khan recognized the value of the script and commissioned Tatatunga to use the Uigur alphabet to write in Mongolian. Two years later he ordered him to assist his adoptive son Shigi Khutuku to put in writing the Mongol common law in a Blue Book called köke debter. The new Mongol script was also used to codify the Great Yasa, the secret directives for ruling and conducting war. The adaptation of the Uigur script was further developed by the Tibetan scholar Sakya Pandita, who lived in Karakorum from 1247 to 1251, and it continued to be refined into the eighteenth century. However, the Phagspa script, commissioned by Kublai Khan and created by Sakya Pandita's nephew Phagspa out of the Tibetan seal script, did not gain acceptance and was used only until the fall of the Yuan Dynasty in 1386.[46] A few Nestorian gravestones in the southern Chinese coastal city of Zaitun are inscribed in Phagspa.[47] In the seventeenth century the Kalmyk, Buryat and Manchurian scripts were derived from the vertically written Mongol alphabet.

The Turkic Uigurs, who lived south-west of the conquered Naiman in today's province of Xinjiang and were highly developed culturally,

Outer wall of the princes' necropolis of the Xi Xia Dynasty (1032–1227) near Yinchüan, Ningxia province, China. Many Nestorian communities lived in the realm of the Tangut until the fourteenth century.

were for their part mostly Buddhist, with only minorities of Nestorians and Manichaeans, as well as Muslims in the west. The numerous Uigur Turkic documents found in the Turfan basin attest to the spread of Christianity at that time.[48] In light of the relentless advance of the invincible Mongols, the Uigur king Bartchuq, who was a vassal of the Kara Khitai Empire, decided in 1209 voluntarily to place himself under the protection of Genghis Khan, which allowed his mostly settled people and the cities to escape destruction.[49]

A more serious opponent than the Uigur was the empire of Xi Xia, which bordered them to the east and corresponded to the modern provinces of Gansu, Ningxia and the western region of Inner Mongolia. It had been founded by the eastern Tibetan people called the Tangut and was in its majority Buddhist, but had large Nestorian and Muslim minorities. Rubruk referred that the Nestorians had no crucifix and described a statue of the archangel Michael,[50] while Marco Polo – who, in 1273, encountered Nestorians and churches in several cities of Eastern Turkistan, Tangut and even in Xining, on the border with Tibet – saw in the present city of Zhangye 'three lovely [Nestorian] churches'.[51] The pilgrim monks Rabban Bar Sauma and Rabban Markos travelled to Tangut some five years later. 'They reached the city of Tangut [today Yinchuan in Ningxia]. When the people heared that Rabban Sauma and Rabban Markos had come in order to go to Jerusalem, they went forth eagerly to meet them, men and women, old and young, for the

Shepherd in western Mongolia, homeland of the formerly Nestorian Naiman.

people of Tangut were ardent believers and their minds were pure.'[52]

After several Mongol military campaigns between 1205 and 1209 the Tangut king – whose capital near present Yinchüan Genghis Khan could not capture – acknowledged Mongol sovereignty and made a commitment to military aid. But in 1219, when Genghis Khan ordered the Tangut to give him troops for the beginning campaign against Shah Mohammed II of Choresm (†1220/21), whose empire stretched from the Caucasus to India and Samarqand, they did not think to fulfil their obligation to provide assistance. Moreover, the commander-in-chief of Xi Xia, General Asa Gambu, mocked the Mongol ambassadors. 'If his [Genghis Khan's] troops do not suffice, he does not deserve to be ruler.'[53]

After the conquest and plundering of Choresm, Genghis Khan took terrible revenge for this offensive insubordination. In the autumn of 1226 he attacked Xi Xia and defeated the Tangut in several battles. Although Genghis Khan died before the end of the war in 1227, prior to his death he ordered that the Tangut capital be razed to the ground and all its inhabitants massacred – which is what happened. In his excavations of 1908–1909 in Kara Khoto, 630 kilometres north-west of Yinchüan, the Russian scholar P. K. Kozlov discovered several Nestorian manuscript fragments in the Turkish language and Estrangela script, which show that there was an East Syrian community on the Tangut border with Mongolia as well.[54]

The Nestorian Küchlüg and the Turkic tribes of present Kyrgyzstan

When Genghis Khan conquered the tribal alliance of the Naiman, Küchlüg, son of the fallen king, succeeded in escaping to the west. His odyssey concluded in Balasagun, capital of the Kara Khitai Empire, which lay in the valley of the Chu in the Land of Seven Rivers *Semirjetschie*, to the east of the modern capital of Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek. The rulers there were descendants of the Mongol people of the Khitai, who ruled northern China from 907 to 1125 under the name of the Liao Dynasty. When they were driven out by the Manchurian Jin, a minority of the strongly Chinese-influenced Khitai fled to the west and around 1130 took northern Kyrgyzstan away from the Islamic Karakhanids of Kashgaria. The Kara Khitai then conquered Transoxania and Kashgaria.[55] The overwhelming victory of the non-Muslim khan Yelü Dashi (ruled 1130–1143) over the two powerful Muslim rulers Rukn ad-Din Mahmud of Samarqand in 1137 and his feudal lord, the sultan of the Seljuks Sanjar, in 1141 presumably provided fertile ground for the myth of the Christian priest-king John. Around 1145 the historian Otto of Freising (1111–1158) reported that an East Syrian presbyter John defeated Muslim kings in Asia and intended to liberate Palestine. That Yelü Dashi was not Christian but rather Buddhist played no role, since at that time Europe did not know of Buddhism and assumed that the successful enemy of the Muslims must necessarily be a Christian prince.[56] Now the possibility appeared to the European princes of winning as an ally in the fight against Islam this mysterious Asian ruler. In fact the rulers of Kara Khitai were unique, in that, for the first time in history, the Islamicization of a society was stopped and for a time held at bay. Although the majority of the Turkic peoples of the Kara Khitai Empire remained Muslim, both Chinese Buddhism and Nestorian Christianity were able to expand.

The Nestorian refugee Küchlüg succeeded in winning the favour of the elderly Gur Khan Yelü Zhilugu (ruled 1178–1211), who gave him his Buddhist daughter. But in 1210/1211 the power-hungry Küchlüg overthrew his father-in-law, and ruled over the now weakened empire of Kara Khitai until his death in 1218. The usurper intensified the anti-Islamic policies of his predecessor and forced the Muslims of Kashgar and Khotan to convert to either Nestorianism or Buddhism. He had the contradictory imam of Khotan crucified. When Genghis Khan finally pursued his old enemy Küchlüg in 1218, the Muslims of Kara Khitai rebelled and handed the cities of Balasagun and Kashgar over to the Mongols without a fight. With Küchlüg, who was killed while fleeing, the final independent Nestorian Mongol prince passed away.[57]

After Genghis Khan's death the Land of Seven Rivers came under the control of his second son Chagatai (†1242), who supported the Christians. The regions along the Chu and Talas rivers, however, were involved in power struggles among the Mongols, which led to the decline of trade and agriculture. As a conse-quence of the advancing desertification, arable land became pasture, so a nomadic society replaced the earlier agrarian and urban culture. Then, in 1338 and 1339, the plague brought an end to the Nestorian community of the Chu valley, since it carried off practically all the entire settled population, as one can conclude from the great number of gravestones dating from this time. At the same time the Muslim sultan Ali massacred a Roman Catholic bishop and six missionaries in the region of Almalik.[58] The last of the about 650 known Christian gravestones of Kyrgyzstan dates from 1345, the last one of Almalik from 1372.[59]

That Nestorian Christianity flourished in the Chagatai Khanate – that is, the region ruled by the descendants of Chagatai – is clear from historical travel narratives and archaeological

discoveries. Marco Polo, who erroneously called Chagatai a Christian, told of the Nestorian Christians and their churches in Samarqand, Kashgar and Yarkand.[60] In fact, around 1180 Patriarch Elias III (in office 1176–1190) added to the metropolitans of Samarqand and Turkistan a Metropolitan John for Kashgar in the far west of Xinjiang.[61] Around 1281 and 1350 Almalik, 500 kilometres north of Kashgar on the River Ili, shared the metropolitan see with Beshbaliq.[62] When Rabban Bar Sauma and Rabban Markos visited Kashgar six or seven years after Marco Polo, 'the city was empty of its inhabitants, because it had been plundered by the enemy'.[63] However, in 1340 Kashgar was again cited as a metropolitan see. Additionally, until the twelfth century there were Christian communities in Khotan and Asku.[64] As the Portuguese Jesuit Bento de Goes (1562–1607) reported, in 1604 the Muslim ruler of Kashgar was aware that his predecessors had been Christians.[65]

Most of the archaeological evidence for the spread of Nestorian Christianity in the khanate of Chagatai comes from the Land of Seven Rivers. There are the approximately 610 gravestones, which were found in the late nineteenth century in the Chu valley in the two medieval cemeteries of Karajigak, ten kilometres south-east of Bishkek, and Burana near Tokmak, 62 kilometres east of Bishkek. Unfortunately, nearly 500 gravestones were lost in a museum fire in 1939. A few isolated discoveries followed later in the neighbouring regions of Krasnaja Rejka and Kok-Djar, as well as in Saruu on the south-eastern bank of Lake Issyk-Kul and in the diocesan centre of Almalik, which was the capital of Chagatai and his successors.[66] In total 210 to 225 gravestones are still extant.[67] The earliest gravestones are dated to the years 1095 and 1115 but they are found in large numbers only beginning with 1250, permitting the conclusion that a small Nestorian community was already flourishing here in the period of the Kara Khitai but was later enlarged due either to missionary activity or to the arrival of Christian settlers. A cross is carved into each gravestone, and many bear inscriptions. These Christians of Turkic descent inscribed their gravestones in the Estrangela script, mostly in the Syriac language

Nestorian gravestone of a woman, Historical Museum of Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The stone remembers 'Qushtans, the mother of Ispahsalar' [Persian army leader] and is dated 1573 of the Seleucian calendar, which corresponds to our year 1261/62. The word Qushtans is not a personal name, but is a Sogdian loan-word meaning 'female teacher'.[57]

(Opposite bottom) Nestorian gravestone, Toktogul Satulganov Museum, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. The gravestone, discovered in 1963 near Saruu on the southern shore of Lake Issyk-Kul, bears a lengthy inscription in the Turkish language and Syriac script, which reads as follows: 'According to the reckoning of King Alexander, it was in the year 1647 [i.e. 1335], on the fourteenth of December…at the first light of dawn, in the year of the mouse, Khan Jenkshi set himself upon the throne, at the head of the empire [of the territory of the Chagatanids] and prepared for this Alma Khatun a commemoration [?], she was a new bride [?]… this woman fled in the year of the pig… she died at exactly age twenty-six… May a memorial be built to her and may she never be forgotten by her friends.'[58] The young Nestorian woman, who bore the honorific title 'khatun', was the wife of Khan Jenkshi (ruled 1335–1338/1339), who came to power because his predecessor and grandfather Tarmashirin (ruled 1326–1334) converted to Islam, inciting the ire of the nomads around Lake Issyk-Kul. They rebelled and elevated the young Jenkshi as their khan. The memorial to Alma Khatun, who died before 14 December 1335, shows that Nestorian women could still in the fourteenth century gain entry into the ruling family of the Ulus of Chagatai, by means of marriage. Khan Jenkshi supported the Nestorians and the Catholic missionaries and had one of his sons baptized with the name John. After his early death around 1338 / 1339 many Christians of Almalik were massacred by the Muslim Sultan Ali.[59]

and occasionally, in the region of Almalik, in Turkic, which suggests that Syriac was the liturgical language.[68]

The Mongol campaigns of war and plunder that followed the death of Küchlüg were directed mainly against Muslim states such as Choresm, but the Christian Nestorians suffered severely on account of the terrible fighting. This was all the more so because at the time the Nestorians lived principally in cities; every city that mounted an opposition to the Mongols was levelled and its entire population massacred. The Mongol toleration in religious affairs ceased in times of war, as soon as opposition emerged. In the course of the systematic plundering and destruction of Khorassan and Afghanistan between 1220 and 1222, the following cities were destroyed and their inhabitants murdered: Gurgentch with 1,250,000 dead, Nishapur with 500,000 to 1,500,000 dead, Merv with 700,000 to 1,300,000 dead, Bamyan with 500,000 dead – here the Mongols also killed all dogs and cats – Herat with 1,600,000 dead, Ghazna and Balkh with hundreds of thousands dead each. Samarqand and Bukhara were completely plundered, and the male inhabitants were sacrificed as human shields at the vanguard of the next attack on a city. After each conquest the Mongols left behind piles of debris and fields of corpses; in total the approximately 150,000 Mongol warriors murdered, according to Juvaini, about 6,000,000 people.[69] The additional mass deportations, however, encouraged the spread of Islam into west and central China.

The long-term consequences appear just as dramatic, as the oasis lands of Khorassan and Afghanistan, renowned for their fertility, literally turned to desert. Whole regions were depopulated, the irrigation canals fell into ruin and arable land turned fallow. The deserts found today in Khorassan and Afghanistan are not all natural phenomena but, rather, were created by the hand of man, the consequence of a campaign of nomadic raids of gigantic proportions.

The myth of Prester John and the encounter of Catholic monks with Nestorians in Mongolia

The background to the creation of the myth of a powerful Christian priest-king in Asia is formed by the Crusades, which began in 1097 to liberate Jerusalem from the Muslims, who were preventing European pilgrims from making their journey. After the establishment of the Frankish earldoms of Edessa and Antioch in 1098 and the rapid conquest of Jerusalem in 1099, Muslim opposition hardened. In 1144 the first Crusader state, the earldom of Edessa, was lost to the ruler of Mosul and Aleppo, Zengi (†1146), which inspired the beleaguered Crusaders to seek out allies. It is no coincidence that, just one year later, the historian Otto von Freising for the first time reported that a virtuous and pious Christian king in Asia had defeated Muslim rulers.[70] After von Freising gave a second version of his 'report' to Emperor Frederick Barbarossa I in 1157, the forged *Letter of Prester John* to Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (ruled 1143–1180), commissioned by the imperial chancellor Rainald of Dassel, appeared between 1160 and 1165.[71]

The material for this was supplied by the Nestorians living in Syria and Palestine, who told the Crusaders about the Christian princes among the Turko-Mongol peoples. Since Prester John was for Europeans an incomprehensible, mythic figure, over a long period of time several real Christian princes served as background figures. Among them were the Kerait prince, not known by name, who professed Christianity in 1007; his later successors Mark, Cyriacus and Toghril Khan; the king of Kara Kithai Yelü Dashi; and Gur Khan Küchlüg.[72] Historically verified contact of the Crusaders with the Nestorians occurred between 1217 and 1221, when Bishop Jacob of Vitry (†1240) accompanied the Fifth Crusade to Egypt and met East Syrians in Damietta. In his letters he referred to the Christian subjects

of the priest-king as *Nestorians* and described a King David, who was a great-grandson of Prester John and had conquered Kashgar, Bukhara and Samarqand. Now Genghis Khan, who had stormed Bukhara and Samarqand in 1220, stood behind the mythical Christian king.[73] At first, on account of the innaccurate reports, the Western European princes and the pope could regard the advancing Mongols as potential allies against the Islamic states of the Middle East, but the attacks on the Christian kingdoms and principalities of Georgia in 1221 and Russia in 1223, as well as the destruction between 1237 and 1241 of most of the cities of Russia, the Ukraine, Hungary, Poland, Bohemia, Moravia and Dalmatia, taught them better. The Mongols were no pious Christians but rather a warrior people whose army had achieved an incomparably higher level of organization and discipline than had those of Western Europe. Only Ögödei's death in 1241 saved Western Europe from destruction, since the election of a new great khan required the presence of the leading princes and officers – the Mongolian horsemen disappeared with as much haste as they had burst forth from the barren steppes. In order to salvage the myth of John, the chronicler Alberich of Troisfontaine (†1259) 'reported' that King John had been killed in an uprising, which left open the option of looking for his heirs.[74]

Western Europe was aware of the impending danger of the feared Mongols. Although the Mongol princes were not Christians, they had destroyed the powerful Islamic empire of Choresm; additionally, many Christians lived under their rule. The rumour also persisted that the Mongol rulers were prepared to accept the Christian faith. These factors and the loss of Jerusalem again to Islam in 1244 inspired Pope Innocent IV (in office 1243–1254) and King Louis IX of France (ruled 1226–1270) to initiate direct contact with the Mongol great khans, in order to keep them out of Europe and to explore the possibilities of a strategic alliance. The pope also hoped to be able to win the Nestorians back to the 'true faith'.

Ruin A of the complex of Khukh Burd Süme, central Mongolia. The floorplan of the two-storey building, which rises as high as seven metres, is cruciform. A palace was constructed here in the seventeenth century atop the ruins of an older temple from the eleventh/twelfth centuries.[60] Since at that time Buddhism had not yet gained a foothold in Mongolia, and adherents of shamanistic Tengrism erected no permanent sacred buildings, the question arises of whether a Christian-Nestorian shrine was originally found here in the area of the Christian Kerait.

Pope Innocent IV seized the initiative and sent four delegations in rapid succession. While Laurent of Portugal, named in 1245, presumably only got as far as the Mongol encampment on the Caspian Sea, John of Plano Carpini (1182–1252) reached his goal, as he first met Batu (†1255), the khan of the Mongol Golden Horde, whose rule encompassed Russia and the Caucasus, and then late in the summer of 1246 attended the inauguration of Great Khan Güyük at Karakorum. Caprini was surprised not only by the presence of numerous Christians of various confessions in the great khan's camp but also by the fact that Nestorians held the highest state offices. Among them were the imperial chancellor Chinkai (†1251/1252), who independently ruled northern China, 'where no edict could be proclaimed without the approval of Chinkai written in Uigur', and Güyük's tutor, military commander, and imperial administrator, Qadaq (†1251/1252).[75] However, even though Güyük surrounded himself with Nestorian ministers, he never came

close to considering being baptized or supporting the Crusaders. To the contrary, his two letters to the pope include barely concealed threats of war: 'This is a decree to the great pope. You sent us an offer of your submission, which we have accepted. You have said that I should become a trembling Christian, worship God, and become an ascetic. How do you know whom God absolves and whom He shows mercy? From the rising of the sun to its setting, all lands have been made subject to me. Who could do this contrary to the command of God? Thus, if you accept peace, you Pope in person at the head of the monarchs, all of you without exception, must come to tender us service and pay us hommage. But if you should not believe our letters and the command of God, then we shall know for certain that you wish to have war. Only God knows what will happen.'[76] Güyük's reply reveals the limits of the influence of the Nestorian dignitaries, who were evidently well disposed towards their European fellow believers. Güyük's early death after only two years of rule spared Europe from a third campaign, as his successors Möngke and Kublai no longer oriented their policies towards the west but rather towards the east.

Only three stone tortoises, which serve as the bases of steles, recall the one-time capital of the Mongol Empire, Karakorum. The excavations begun by German archaeologists in 2000 have still not found the Nestorian church described by Rubruk.[57a]

Less skilful than Carpini were the two Dominicans Ascelin of Cremona and Simon of St Quentin, who spoke before General Baiju in Armenia in 1247. Their arrogant behaviour enraged the commander, who condemned them to death; they owed their reprieve to the arrival of Baiju's superior, Eljigidei. He sent them back with a letter to the pope and accompanied by the Mongol Nestorian Sarkis. A year later Eljigidei, who was planning an attack on Baghdad for the summer of 1249, sent two Nestorians from northern Iraq, Mark and David, to Cyprus to King Louis IX of France. He offered Louis a military alliance against the Muslim opponents of the Crusaders and asked the pious Christian king to see to the protection of all the Christians living in the Crusaders states, including the Nestorians.[77] When the two Nestorians erroneously told Louis that Güyük's mother Töregene was a Christian, he decided to send the Dominican Andrew de Longjumeau, who had travelled to Tabriz in 1246/1247, to Eljigidei and the Great Khan. When he reached Mongolia in 1250, he met Güyük's widow Oghul Qimish, who was serving as regent. Her response was cool, as she refused all military alliances and instead demanded tribute.[78]

Catholic Europe not only misjudged the Mongol rulers and their policies, it also showed little understanding of its rediscovered sister Churches. In this regard, the Dominicans condemned Princess Sorqaqtani's Nestorian confessor and long-time representative for Christian affairs, Rabbanata (†1259), whom they met in Tabriz, as 'a usurer, magician, and heretic doomed to hell'.[79] Presumably it was Rabbanata's support for the East Syrians living in the Crusader states that raised the ire of the Dominicans. During de Longjumeau's first visit to Tabriz, Rabbanata had given him a letter addressed to the pope, in which he requested

ecumenical unity in prayer and demanded that the Crusaders no longer harass the Nestorians living in the areas under their control.[80] Although Catholic Europe appeared before the Mongols as a supplicant, it was unable to overcome its confessional arrogance and prejudices regarding the Oriental Christians. The Armenians, however, acknowledged Rabbanata's merits without reservation, although they, as Miaphysites, rejected East Syrian Christology. Rabbanata had been sent to the Caucasus and Azerbaijan equipped with wide-ranging authority from Ögödei, in order to prevent the massacre of unarmed Christians of every confession. The Armenian chronicler Kirakos wrote: 'He established churches in the Muslim cities, where it had until then been forbidden to utter the name of Christ. He built churches, raised crosses, and ordered the holding of worship services with processions, candles, and singing. All the Mongol troops showed him honour.'[81]

Despite the rejection of Oghul Qimish, King Louis did not lose heart and sent the Franciscan William of Rubruk to the great khan. In the summer of 1253, in the territory of the Golden Horde near the river Volga, he met the eldest son of Batu Khan, Sartaq, who was a Nestorian. He ruled only briefly, however, from 1255 to 1256, since his Muslim uncle and successor Berke (ruled 1257–1266) had him poisoned.[82] Although it escaped Rubruk's notice that Sartaq was a Christian, he did notice his uncle's conversion to Islam.[83] In this conversion lay the seed of the conflict between the two western Mongol empires: the Golden Horde, which was slowly Islamicized, and the Iranian Il-Khans, who inclined more towards Buddhism and Christianity. Less than four years after taking power, Berke entered into a military alliance with the arch-enemy of the Il-Khans, the Islamic Mamluks of Egypt. Religious convictions were stronger than family and tribal ties, which irreparably destroyed the Mongol world empire and saved Islamic Egypt from the fate of Baghdad.

Rubruk stayed with the Mongols for the first half of 1254, first in Möngke's yurt camp and then in the capital Karakorum. Here the Nestorian clergy received him warmly. 'The cross raised high with the flag, we proceeded to the church. The Nestorians met us in a procession. Entering the church, we found it prepared for Mass. After it had been celebrated, everyone received communion. They also asked me if I wanted it.'[84] The Nestorians not only invited the Catholic Rubruk to the ecumenical communion but also allowed him to use the church so he could baptize three Catholic children. At Easter they then invited all Christians of various confessions – Armenians, Georgians, Melkite Alans, Russians, Hungarians and Western Europeans – to a shared worship service. Nevertheless, in his travel narrative Rubruk made disparaging remarks about the Nestorian priests: they were drunkards, ignorant, corrupt, greedy, at the death of their wives they would remarry, and their bishops would ordain boys as priests.[85] He also complained that the Nestorians had removed the crucified figure from a silver cross that had been fashioned by the Karakorum silversmith William for Chancellor Bulgai. However, he acknowledged that at Easter they 'baptized more than sixty people in very proper form'.[86]

To all appearances Rubruk remained in solidarity with the Nestorians. When in 1254 Möngke ordered a great theological disputation at Pentecost between Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and an Uigur Manichaean, the Nestorians chose Rubruk as their spokesman. They presented a united front with the Muslims against the Buddhist by defending the oneness of God. Then the Nestorians debated with the Manichaean and the Muslims. Then, on Pentecost Sunday, Möngke summoned Rubruk and the leading Buddhists and explained to them

Map of East Asia as mural painting in the Sala delle Mappe, also called the Sala dello Scudo, in the Palace of the Doges in Venice, sixteenth century, restored in the eighteenth century. On the map, on which north is below and south above, the old capital of the Mongol Empire, Caracoran (Karakorum), appears in the lower centre and the new capital, Cambalu (Beijing), to the left of it.

his position on religion using the analogy of the five fingers.[87]

With regard to politics, Rubruk's mission was a failure, as Möngke's letter to King Louis reiterated Güyük's demand: 'As soon as you [Christian princes] are willing to obey us, send envoys to us. Then we will be certain if you want to have war or peace with us.'[88] He made no mention of the French offer of an anti-Muslim alliance. The Mongol armies still appeared unbeatable, and the advance of Hülägü, Möngke's brother, against the remaining Muslim powers unstoppable. In fact, in 1256/1257 the Mongols stormed and destroyed the fortresses of the feared Assassins and in 1258 conquered Baghdad, after which Damascus fell and the Mongols pushed on to Gaza – but then the unthinkable happened. Möngke died, and the Golden Horde threatened the northern border of Iran. Hülägü returned to Iran with most of the troops, and left his Nestorian general Kitbuqa with only a small army. When the Mameluk commander and future Sultan Baibars (r. 1260-77) of Egypt asked the Crusaders for support against the Mongol invader, the Frankish barons helped Baibars by allowing him free passage through their territory. Baibars, who was originally a Kipchak horse warrior, subsequently defeated the outnumbered Kitbuqa at Ain Jalut near Nazareth and had him beheaded. Baibars 'thanked' the Crusaders for their help by seizing most of the coastal cities, such as Jaffa, Caesarea and Antioch. From then on the Mongol Il-Khanate of Iran was on the defensive, and – what

a reversal of fortune – appeared before Western Europeans, scorned just a few years earlier, as supplicants. For the Church of the East, however, the Muslim victory at Ain Jalut had serious long-term consequences.[89]

Nestorian Mongol princesses and high-ranking Nestorian dignitaries

At the time of the Mongol Great Khans and the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368), the Church of the East found itself in the forecourt of power, so to speak. The goodwill shown towards Christianity rested on three pillars: first, the traditional religious toleration of the Mongol rulers, which benefited all faiths; second, the far-reaching marital alliances established over several generations between the family of Genghis Khan and the Turko-Mongol tribes of Christian faith; and, third, the high educational level of the Nestorians. In particular, the three great khans who succeeded Genghis Khan, Ögödei, Güyük and Möngke, prized the services of Nestorians who could read and write. Under the founder of the Yuan Dynasty, Kublai Khan (ruled 1260–1294), two additional motives emerged for the preference for Nestorians. First, after the conquest of southern China, completed in 1279, Kublai divided society into four social classes: at the top Mongols, then foreigners such as Central Asians and Iranians, third northern Chinese, and finally southern Chinese. In the appointment to high office, the first two classes enjoyed the advantage. The Nestorians, whose numbers were small in comparison to the total population of China, were disproportionately represented in the two upper classes and hardly found at all in the lower classes. Second, the emperor harboured a certain mistrust towards Muslims because the concept of holy war, laid out in the Koran, contradicted the Mongol principle of religious toleration.[90]

The most famous and influential Mongol princess was the niece of the vanquished Kerait king Toghril, Soqaqtani-Beki (†1252), whom Genghis Khan married to his son Tolui, while he married her sister Ibaka-Beki and gave her other sister, Bektumish-Beki, to his son Jöchi. Sorqaqtani not only gave birth to the Great Khan Möngke, Great Khan and Emperor Kublai Khan, his rival Arikböge, and Il-Khan Hülägü, she also was able, after the 1249 death of Great Khan Güyük, who came from the house of Ögödei, to change the succession to the house of her husband Tolui, who had died in 1232 – the house she led. Thus she succeeded in outmanoeuvring Güyük's widow Oghul Qimish, who was serving as regent and wanted to place her nephew Shiramon on the throne. Before Sorqaqtani, the regent Töregene had already been able to help her son Güyük take the throne.[91] In this way the clans of Ögödei, Jöchi and Chagatai were passed over, and Möngke was elected Great Khan in 1251. Almost twenty years earlier, after Tului's death, Great Khan Ögödei had tried in vain to persuade Sorqaqtani to wed his son Güyük. In 1310, almost sixty years after her death, she was posthumously granted the title of empress, and liturgies according to the East Syrian rite were celebrated in the capital Beijing and in her burial chapel in present-day Zhangye in the province of Gansu.[92]

Sorqaqtani was an extraordinary individual, who carefully prepared her sons for their future roles and had great diplomatic skills. The Miaphysite bishop and historian Bar Hebraeus (†1286) wrote of her: 'This queen raised her sons so well that all the princes marvelled at her power of administration. [She had led the clan of Tolui since 1232.] She was a Christian, sincere and true like [Queen] Helena. A certain poet said, *if I were to see a second woman like her, I should say that the race of women was far superior to that of men.*'[93] It should be added that the social status of women among the Mongols was incomparably better than it was in China, for instance, or

in the Muslim societies. It is a phenomenon observed among many nomadic peoples that the woman is equal to the man in her area of life, and has wide-ranging responsibi-lities not only in household affairs but also in the management of the herds.

Sorqaqtani's cousin Dokuz Khatun (†1265), likewise a pious Nestorian, was a still more resolute champion of her religion. Dokuz Khatun was at first like Sorqaqtani married to Genghis Khan's youngest son, Tului, and after his death she married one of the sons resulting from the marriage of Tului with her cousin, namely Hülägü, the conqueror of Mesopotamia. Dokuz Khatun's niece, the Nestorian Tuqiti Khatun, also married Hülägü. Dokuz Khatun exercised great influence over her husband and arranged for him to have several churches built, in which the Buddhist Hülägü attended mass. She also saw to it that the discriminatory measures placed on Christians were lifted.[94] Her son Abaqa (ruled 1265–1282) also had a Nestorian wife, named Nukdan Khatun, as did his son Arghun (ruled 1284–1291). This wife was Uruk Khatun, who had her son baptized with the name Nicholas, but he converted to Islam for political reasons and ruled under the name Oljaitu (ruled 1304–1316).[95]

Besides these princesses, the Nestorians Khan Sartaq and King Görgüz of the Öngüt, Nestorian ministers and military commanders also exercised considerable influence. Chief among these were Chinkai, born c. 1171, and later Qadaq. Both were, first, long-time commanders under Genghis Khan, after which they served Ögödei and Güyük as ministers. After his military career Chinkai became governor of Altai, then state secretary under Ögödei and chancellor under Güyük, as which he ruled northern China practically independently. Qadaq, for his part, was Güyük's tutor and rose to become imperial administrator. In the power struggle that broke out after Güyük's death, between the house of Ögödei and that of Tolui, they took the side of Güyük's widow Oghul Qimish and supported the Ögödei's clan. But when, thanks to his mother Sorqaqtani, Möngke prevailed, he had both ministers executed in 1251/1252. However, this did not prevent Chinkai's descendants from holding high state offices during the Yuan Dynasty.[96] The Nestorian Bulgai had a similar biography. He served Möngke as finance and interior minister; in the latter function he was responsible for the great khan's security. The Muslim historian Juvaini reported that Bulgai appeared at the Möngke's enthronement as the 'leader of all ministers' – that is, as prime minister.[97] But, like Chinkai and Qadaq, after Möngke's death he chose the wrong side. He supported the loser Arikböge against his brother Kublai Khan, who had him executed in 1264.

General Kitbuqa, a Nestorian from the tribe of the Naiman or Kerait, also met with a violent death. As Hülägü's best commander, he participated substantially in the 1258 conquest of Baghdad and the defeat of the powerful Assassin sect. After the conquests of Aleppo and Damascus, Hülägü appointed him governor there. The Christians greeted Kitbuqa and Hülägü as liberators sent by God to free them from six hundred years of Muslim bondage. For the Christians of Mesopotamia and Syria the appearance of the Nestorian General Kitbuqa seemed to herald a new era, in which they would for the first time have equal rights with the Muslims. They secretly hoped that Hülägü, under the influence of his Christian wife Dokuz Khatun, would convert to Christianity. To the oppressed Christians Kitbuqa appeared as a historic St George who stormed in from Asia to liberate and avenge them. They had gratefully noticed that, during the conquest of Baghdad and Aleppo, the Mongols had spared the Christians from the general massacre each time. For a short time there emerged the dream that Christians would rule the Middle East again and

The citadel of Aleppo, Syria, fell in 1260 to the Nestorian Mongol general Kitbuqa, whose ruler Hülägü was very well disposed towards the Church of the East. The Christians of Aleppo and Damascus celebrated the Mongols as liberators from the Islamic yoke. The present fortifications date back to the Ayyubid Sultan Zahir Ghazi (ruled 1193–1215); the Mamluks rebuilt them after the destructions of 1260 and 1400 in the years 1292 and 1402. The citadel was damaged in July 2015 during the Syrian Civil War.

Mesopotamia for the first time. One can in fact speculate that a triple alliance of the Mongols with the Crusaders and Byzantium might have broken the sole remaining Muslim power, the Mamluks. This in turn might have inspired the Mongol Il-Khans to accept not Islam, which was alien to them, but rather Christianity, which was familiar on account of family relationships. But it worked out differently, as Kitbuqa was decisively defeated on 3 September 1260 at Ain Jalut, after which the victorious Mamluks conquered Damascus and carried out a bloodbath among the Christians as revenge.[98]

Besides Kitbuqa other Nestorian military commanders are known by name, such as, for example, one Giwargis, one Sauma, who died in 1272 and one Yohannan Tegin, all three of whom came from the Chu valley in Kyrgyzstan.[99] A less militaristic path was chosen by the Nestorian Simeon Rabbanata (†1259), who was first Toghril Khan's adviser and later provided pastoral guidance to Toghril's niece Sorqaqtani.[100] After 1233 Great Khan Möngke sent him as an authorized representative for Christian affairs to Azerbaijan and Armenia, where he successfully put an end to the murder of unarmed Christians. At the same time he had churches built in the region around Tabriz, which was hostile to Christians, and baptized many Mongols. Rabbanata worked to establish ecumenical dialogue with Rome, but because of the Roman high-handedness and inflexibility these efforts remained unsuccessful.[101]

Under the dynasty of the Yuan (1271–1368)

Nestorians also occupied high office, although their power was less than that of their forebears who had served the great khans. In China at that time Christians of all confessions were called *Yelikewen*, the phonetic rendering of the Mongol term Ärkä'ün. This was then connected to the Greek, with the accusative form ἀρχήγόύ of the nominative ἀρχήγός, archon, which means 'chief', 'leader'.[102] Thus the Greek term was taken up first by Syriac, after which Nestorian Turko-Mongols adopted it into Uigur and Mongol, and it finally appeared in the vocabulary of Chinese administration.

The most important Nestorian who served the Yuan was the Syrian-born physician and astronomer Ai Xieh (Jesus, 1227–1308). Rabbanata introduced him to Güyük, after which Kublai Khan appointed him head of the office for Western astronomy and medicine. In 1284 Kublai Khan ordered the Nestorian, who was skilled in languages, to serve as translator for a high-ranking delegation to Il-Khan Arghun in Baghdad. From there Ai Xieh took to Pope Honorius IV (in office 1285–1287) a letter, in which the Mongol Il-Khan offered the pope an offensive military alliance against Egypt: 'The land of Egypt lies between us, we will crush it. We are sending you these messengers and ask you to send an expedition and an army to the land of Egypt. We [will come] from our side and you from yours, so that we will crush them.'[103] After his return Kublai named him head of the office for Christian religion in 1291, and in 1297 he was promoted to state minister. He received the posthumous title of a 'loyal and learned prince of Fulin'. His five Nestorian sons also held high office; however, in 1330 his eldest son Elias was charged with rebellion and sorcery, and beheaded.[104]

As a result of the Mongol conquest of southern China, accomplished between 1276 and 1279, the Church of the East was able to expand into the lower basin of the Yangtze, an expansion in which the Nestorian Mar Sargis was an important participant. He came from Samarqand, and his father and both grandfathers were renowned physicians at the court of the great khan and the imperial family. From 1277 to 1280 or 1282 Mar Sargis served as vice-governor of the strategically important district of Zhenjiang at the juncture of the great canal with the Yangtze. A Chinese chronicle from 1333 reported: 'One evening in a dream seven gates were opened and two angels addressed him: *You must raise seven monasteries*. When he awoke, he felt inspired, and then resigned office and devoted himself to building the monasteries.'[105] Mar Sargis did have six monasteries constructed in the district of Zhenjiang and another in the port city of Hangzhou.[106] In addition, three more Nestorian churches stood north of Zhenjiang in Yangzhou,[107] an important river port on the great canal, and a total of six Christian churches were found in the port city of Zaitun, today Quanzhou in the province of Fujian.[108]

But time worked against the Church of the East, as the Mongol emperors of China, following the death of Kublai Khan in 1294, conformed themselves rather quickly to their Chinese milieu and took increasing attention to its requirements. In 1304 Taoists from Zhenjiang accused the Nestorians in a civil court of converting Taoists south of the Yangtze to Christianity. The verdict favoured the Taoists: 'Yelikewen are prohibited from usurping precedence in public worship. South of the river [Yangtze] from old times there had only been Buddhism and Taoism, each with its jurisdiction, there had been no Yelikewen besides.'[109] The Buddhist clergy of Zhenjiang were also upset about the obvious popularity of the Nestorian monasteries and complained to the central authorities, whereupon in 1311 (or 1309) two imperial decrees were issued. The first ordered: 'The Yelikewen have taken it to themselves to build Monasteries of the Cross on

land belonging to the [Buddhist] monasteries; let the crosses be torn down and destroyed.' The second decree added: 'As for the Monasteries of the Cross, now that [the images] they modelled have been torn down and destroyed, let new images of Buddha be made and the walls painted afresh.'[110] Thus did the seven monasteries founded by Mar Sargis pass with time into the hands of the Buddhists.

But the Mongol emperors did not only conform themselves to their cultivated Chinese surroundings. After Timur (ruled 1294–1307), there set in within the imperial family an unprecedented decline, which alternated back and forth between the poles of an unbridled hedonism and a blind devotion to Buddhism. Beguiled by his dissipated life, the last Mongol emperor, Toghan Timur (ruled 1333–1368) looked on idly as rebellions broke out in the south beginning in 1352, after which a Mongol prince from the clan of Ögödei rose up against the emperor, and thus dragged China into civil war – one Mongol army fought against another. Thus it was possible for powerful anti-Mongol movements to drive the Mongols from China and conquer the capital, Khan Baliq, in September 1368. Taking the place of the liberal-minded, cosmopolitan, religiously tolerant Mongols of the Yuan Dynasty was the isolationist and nationalistic dynasty of the Ming. Not only foreign civil servants and soldiers were expelled but also merchants and monks. With the fall of the Mongols Christianity disappeared for a second time from the Middle Kingdom.

Did the Church of the East reach Japan or South-east Asia? Much as been speculated about this.[111] As far as Japan is concerned, a Mongol steel helmet with a silver cross on its side was found on the western coast.[112] However, this discovery does not prove the existence of a Nestorian community, but only that a Christian officer of Kublai Khan lost his life here in the failed second attempt to invade Japan in 1281. As for South-east Asia, no relevant discoveries are known, only a few unverifiable reports from travellers. While it is certainly possible that individual Nestorian traders lived temporarily in South-east Asia, there is no evidence for larger, permanent Christian communities.[113]

Cross and lotus: a synthesis of Christian and Buddhist symbolism on the eastern coast of China

The new rulers, the Ming, ordered not only the expulsion of foreign monks but also the destruction of their religious buildings. Thus in 1369 or 1389 in Zaitun, today Quanzhou in Fujian, six Christian churches were razed and the graves of adherents of foreign religions desecrated; the gravestones were used for construction of the city wall. Part of the old city wall was torn down in 1920 and the remainder in 1938. Ancient Muslim and Christian gravestones were found under the rubble. Today this unique collection includes over one hundred Muslim and about forty-five Christian gravestones.[114]

Under the Yuan Dynasty the city of Zaitun on the Yellow Sea in south-eastern China was the largest port of China. Here in 1292 Marco Polo embarked on his return journey. In this trading metropolis the Chinese met merchants from Burma, Java, Sumatra, Iran, the Middle East and Europe. Among the Christians several confessions were represented, such as Nestorians, Armenians and Catholics. In light of the international character of Zaitun, it is hardly surprising that Christian gravestones have been discovered here, as well as in other southern Chinese cities such as Yangzhou. Some resemble a decorated altar, others the lid of a sarcophagus with a gabled roof, on which is chiselled a cross on a lotus.[115] With regard to scripts and languages, six types can be distinguished: 1, Chinese script and language; 2, bilingual in Chinese and Turkic

language in Syriac script; 3, Syriac script and Turkic language; 4, Phagspa-Mongol script and Chinese language; 5, Uigur script and Turkic language; and 6, Latin. In three Nestorian inscriptions in the Turkic language the formula of the Trinity is written in Syriac.[116] Since Turko-Mongol Nestorians generally used the Turkic language, while East Syrian merchants who had travelled by sea favoured Syriac or Arabic, it may be concluded that the majority of the Nestorian community of Zaitun was Turko-Mongols, who functioned there as middlemen.

The bilingual Chinese–Turkic grave stele is unusual because it was erected for a Nestorian Bishop Mar Solomon, who died in 1313 and who was described as 'administrator of the Manichaeans and Nestorians in the district of Jiangnan' – that is, the region south of the Jangtsekiang.[117] In light of the thousand-year-old rivalry between Nestorians and Manicheans, it is quite astonishing that a Nestorian bishop also oversaw the Manichaean community. But we find the solution to the puzzle in Marco Polo's *Millione*. He reports that around 1292 he and his uncle Maffeo encountered near Fuzhou, some 100 kilometres north of Zaitun, people of an unfamiliar religion. They questioned them and examined their sacred scriptures, which they interpreted as psalters. Thus the Polos identified them as Christians and advised them to have themselves registered as Christians in Beijing, in order to enjoy the privileges accorded to Christians.[118] For this reason they were placed under the Nestorian bishop of southern China. Bishop Solomon must have noticed rather quickly, however, that his new charges were not Christians at all but Manichaeans. But as bishop he was also a state employee, and therefore had to oversee the Manichaeans too. In any case, the Manichaeans had succeeded, following the ban of 843, in fleeing not only to Gansu and Turkistan but also to the coastal region of southern China. Thus the question arises, whether there was not in China also a continual Christian presence from the Tang to the Yuan. The only positive evidence for such continuity is provided by the highly disputed travel report of the Jewish merchant Jacob of Ancona, who is said to have visited Zaitun in 1271 before Marco Polo. According to his narrative, the Nestorian Christians of Zaitun were aware that more than 600 years earlier a 'certain priest Alofeno [Alopen] of Tatsin' had come to China. However, the authenticity of the text is highly questionable.[119]

With regard to the Manichaeans, they survived as a community in a form adapted to Buddhism until shortly after 1600. The only extant Manichaean temple in the world stands on Huo-piao hill in Zaitun. It owes its preservation to a misunderstanding, as the faithful thought that the shrine dedicated to Mo-ni was in fact dedicated to Mu-ni – that is, Buddha Shakyamuni.[120] The city of Zaitun, for its part, declined greatly in significance in 1528 when the Ming authorities closed the harbour and concentrated the international sea trade in Guangzhou (Canton).[121]

The iconography of the Nestorian gravestones of southern China displays a fascinating synthesis of Christian, Buddhist, Taoist, Iranian and Hellenistic symbols. The cross usually sits on a lotus blossom, which is carried or surrounded by clouds; sometimes two winged angels flank the cross, or a kind of baldachin crowns the cross. The presence of the cross shows that these grave steles were Christian, as Manichaeans would never depict a cross on gravestones. While the bare cross symbolized the resurrection, the Buddhist lotus blossom represents both the rebirth and the purity of the spirit rooted in this life. As J. P. Brereton has shown, the lotus blossom served as a symbol of renewal among the Greeks, Romans and early Christians as well, and thus was used in funerals.[122] The cloud is found in both Taoism and Buddhism; it symbolizes the rain that brings fertility, happiness and peace.

In Christianity, however, the cloud heralds the transcendence of God; for instance, Yahweh leads Israel through the desert in the form of a pillar of cloud (Ex 13:21), he appears to Moses on Sinai in a cloud (Ex 24:16; 34:5), and the Son of Man will appear on clouds at the end of time (Mark 13:26). In China the baldachin represents heaven, and in Buddhism it is one of the Eight Lucky Symbols and signifies high status, as well as protection.

Finally, angels are familiar in several traditions of the Near East. In the earlier texts of the Old Testament, angels appear first as temporary embodiments of a divine revelation. After the Babylonian Exile, under Assyrian-Babylonian or Zoroastrian influence, they became autonomous spiritual intermediaries between God and the world. They serve as messengers of God, protect individuals and peoples, and praise God. Until the late fourth century Christianity rejected the depiction of winged angels, in order to avoid confusion with the numerous pagan winged victory goddesses, geniuses and cupids. Towards the end of the fourth century there appeared on Christian stone sarcophagi portrayals of two winged angels who flanked or supported the cross, the symbol for Christ's defeat of death. Such flying angels, supporting the cross, are also found on Armenian and Georgian grave steles and on Coptic tympana and lintels. From the standpoint of iconography the proximity to analogous depictions from the Greco-Roman and Sassanian cultures is striking, as the only differences with the Christian portrayals are that the winged Nike figures are female and hold a laurel wreath instead of a cross.[123] This motif was also adopted in the Buddhist cave monasteries of eastern Turkistan, in the form of flying wreath bearers in Kyzil and heavenly musicians, the so-called *apsara*, in Dunhuang. Finally, there is an equally striking resemblance in Zaitun itself, between the depiction of angels in the roof timbers of the Great Hall of the Buddhist Kayuan temple from the later thirteenth century

Nestorian gravestone from Zaitun (Quanzhou), China. Two angels are carrying a vessel, in whose lotus-shaped upper part is found a cross. Thirteenth/fourteenth centuries, 17.5 x 74 centimetres.[61] (Maritime Museum Quanzhou.)

Nestorian gravestone from (Quanzhou), China. The angel with double wings holds in his folded hands a lotus blossom with a cross. The authenticity of this figure is debated. A nearly identical one was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution.[62] (Maritime Museum Quanzhou.)

and the reliefs on the twin pagodas there.[124] It cannot be determined whether the Buddhist wooden figures influenced the design of the Nestorian gravestones or vice versa. On a couple of the steles of Zaitun the angels have moustaches and Mongol crowns or felt caps, which attests to the iconographic blending of Christian and Mongol traditions.[125]

Two grave steles of Zaitun are unusual, as both feature an angel with two pairs of wings. On one he sits like a Buddhist bodhisattva in the meditation position beneath a large cross; in his hands he holds a lotus blossom, from which a cross emerges; clouds and garlands surround him.[126] The second stele is similar, though the large upper cross is absent, and the angel sits in the 'European' style on a cloudbank; the future Buddha Maitreya, however, is also portrayed in this type of sitting position.[127] The gravestones of Zaitun bring together in various ways significant iconographic elements of other religions and cultures, which represent inner peace, reincarnation and the overcoming of death, to create under the sign of the cross a new, richly

symbolic unity.

This Nestorian grave style was also adopted by Catholics at that time. One example is the grave of Bishop Andrea de Perugia, who had joined John of Montecorvino in 1308 at the behest of Pope Clement V and who died in 1332 in Zaitun.[128] The other examples were discovered in Yangzhou; they are the Latin-inscribed grave steles of an Italian pair of siblings called de Vilione. The martyrdom of St Catherina, the Madonna and Jesus are engraved on the stele of Catherina (†1342), and scenes from the Last Judgement on that of Antonio (†1344).[129] Although Nestorians and Catholics were at that time at odds, they remained connected through the design of their gravestones.

A final flourishing under the Mongol Il-Khans of Iran

When Great Khan Möngke handed over rule of the only partially conquered Iran to his brother Hülägü in winter 1251-52, he indirectly inaugurated the final period of flourishing of the Church of the East. He ordered him to conquer the remaining Muslim powers of the Middle East, namely the Abbasid caliphs, the sect of the Assassins and the emirs of Syria and Egypt.[130] The previous Mongolian incursions since 1235 had only been brutal raids, which also destroyed several Christian monasteries around Mosul.[131] Despite the failures in Palestine and Syria, the conquest of Iran succeeded. Between 1256 and 1257 the fortresses of the Assassins south of the Caspian Sea fell or surrendered, which pleased both Muslim rulers and Crusaders, and early in 1258 Baghdad capitulated. Only when the situation became desperate did Caliph al-Mustasim (ruled 1242–1258) ask the Nestorian patriarch Makika II (in office 1257–1265) to negotiate with Hülägü.[132] But it was too late. The conquerors invaded the city. Thanks to Makika and, above all, Hülägü's Nestorian chief wife Dokuz Khatun, the Christians of Baghdad were spared from the general massacre. As a sign of the esteem he enjoyed, Patriarch Makika received one of the caliphal palaces as his new residence, where he had a church built. In the north, Christians could also hope for a better future, since after the revolt of the majority Muslim city of Mosul in 1260/1261 the Nestorian general Samdaqu recaptured it, after which the Christian Zaki acted as governor.[133] The most powerful Christian governor serving the Il-Khans was Mas'ud of Bar Qawta, who ruled Mosul from 1275 to 1277 and from 1284 to 1289. Perhaps he dreamt of building a Christian khanate encompassing north-eastern Mesopotamia, Kurdistan and Azerbaijan.[134]

While the Muslims regard the Mongol onslaught as a catastrophe, in which they lost their God-given pre-eminence, it meant for the Christians a providential liberation from the Islamic yoke. Moreover, the notable piety of Princess Dokuz Khatun and the Christian-friendly policies of Hülägü allowed the Nestorians to hope that the new rulers would convert to Christianity. The Armenian historian Stephanos Orbelian even praised Hülägü and Dokuz Khatun as 'the new Constantine and Helena, the tools for the revenge against the enemies of Christ'.[135] The efforts of the Il-Khans[136] to form a military alliance with the European powers also motivated them towards policies favouring Christians. In any case, during the first forty years of Il-Khan reign Christians were no longer an oppressed minority but, rather, enjoyed equal rights with other religious groups. However, the Christians failed to see that the Mongol rulers devised their policies on religion according to strategic and political criteria and themselves, with the exception of the last Yuan emperors, separated their personal preferences from their politics. The Syrian Orthodox maphrian of the East (chief metropolitan) Bar Hebraeus (1225/

The fortress of Alamut, northern Iran, which was destroyed by the Nestorian army commander Kitbuqa in 1256 and was the headquarters of the Assassins – feared equally by Sunni Muslims and Christians – crowns this rock.

1226–1286) described this pragmatic attitude: 'With the Mongols there is neither slave nor free man, neither believer nor pagan, neither Christian nor Jew; they regard all men as belonging to one and the same stock. All they demand is strenuous service and submission.'[137]

Already after the deaths of Hülägü and Dokuz Khatun in 1265, however, there were the first signs that the Muslim majority would not accept their loss of status without a fight. When in late 1268 the Nestorian patriarch Mar Dinkha I (in office 1265–1281) wanted to baptize a Muslim, a mob from the city attacked him. He was able to flee to the house of the city governor and historian Ata Malik Juvaini (1226–1283), after which he left Baghdad and set up his residence in the citadel of Arbela. He later fled to Iranian Azerbaijan after Muslims attacked a procession he was leading.[138] Like the Buddhists and the Jews, the Christians of Iran remained dependent on the goodwill of the rulers and were corre-spondingly vulnerable; they were finally a plaything of political interests. The escalating conflict – breaking out into open war on the northern border in 1262 – with the Golden Horde, which had been increasingly Islamicized since Khan Berke (ruled 1257–1266), also represented a latent threat to the Christians of Great Iran.

With regard to individual Il-Khans, Abaqa (ruled 1265–1282) and Arghun (ruled 1284–1291) were well disposed towards the Nestorians, for domestic and foreign political reasons and on account of their Christian wives. This goodwill is evident, for instance, in the fact that both khans

had for their Georgian vassals coins minted bearing the Trinitarian formula 'In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the only God' in Arabic, with a cross integrated into the words.[139] Under Abaqa the centre of the khanate moved farther to the north. While Hülägü had transferred his capital from Baghdad to Maragha in the south of the Iranian province of Azerbaijan, Abaqa chose Tabriz, which lay still closer to the threatened northern border. After Abaqa ended the war with the Golden Horde and fended off attacks from Transoxania, he turned towards the west. There Sultan Baibars (ruled 1260–1277), the victor at Ain Jalut, had more than once ravaged the Christian Armenian kingdom of Cilicia, which was closely allied with the Il-Khanate. After Abaqa offered Western European rulers a military alliance three times, all in vain, a joint Mongol–Armenian and Georgian army marched into Syria. But the battle against the Mamluks at Homs in 1281 ended in a defeat of the main Mongol army while the Christians who formed the right wing held their ground; soon thereafter Abaqa died.[140] Mar Dinkha had used the favourable political circumstances to reorganize and strengthen the Church in Central Asia and China. At the same time he agreed to the offer of reconciliation made by the Miaphysite maphrian Bar Hebraeus, which was to bring an end to the seven-hundred-year-long disputes between the Church of the East and the Syrian Orthodox Church.

Obverse of a dirham made of silver, which the Il-Khan Arghun (ruled 1284–1291) had minted for his vassal state, Georgia. The Arabic text reads: 'In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, the only God'; a cross is stamped on the lower left. (Private collection.)

The next two years made the Nestorians clearly aware of their vulnerability. Upon his accession to the throne, Abaqa's brother Taqudar (ruled 1282–1284), who had been baptized with the name Nicholas, declared his conversion to Islam. He took the name Ahmed and began to destroy Buddhist temples and Christian churches or convert them into mosques, whereupon Nestorians and Buddhists appealed to Kublai Khan. Since he was angered and threatened to place sanctions on his nephew Ahmed, Ahmed threw Patriarch Mar Yahballaha III (in office 1281–1317) into prison as revenge after two jealous bishops denounced him as the ringleader of the rebellion that had broken out. The patriarch owed his life and his release to the probably Nestorian mother of the king, Qutui Khatun. The Nestorians and the Mongol nobility, who rejected the forced Islamicization of Iran, initiated by Ahmed, now rallied around Aqaba's rebellious son Arghun, who in 1284 defeated Ahmed and had him executed. Khan Arghun (ruled 1284–1291) succeeded in damming the flood of Muslim revolts, granting the Church of the East and the Christians a final and brief period of good fortune. Since Mar Yahballaha III, on account of his alleged or actual support for the rebelling party, just barely escaped death, he came to enjoy the friendship and esteem of Arghun. The patriarch transferred his see to Maragha and was able to rebuild the churches destroyed by Ahmed. A contemporary reported: 'He enjoyed fame and power as no [patriarch] before him. The Mongols, the Il-khan, and his children bare their heads and bend their knees before him. His orders are carried out in the empire, and the Christians are elevated to great

honour and power.'[141]

Despite the favour of the Il-Khan, in 1285 and 1286 ugly anti-Christian rioting broke out in Mosul, suggesting that, without state support, a terrible fate threatened the Christians. Another omen was the persecution of Jews that occurred upon Arghun's death. The rage of the Muslims was incited by Arghun's preferential treatment of Christians, Jews and Buddhists in appointments to high office and further inflamed by the strong position of the Jewish finance minister Sa'd ad-Daula. Sa'd was murdered, and the Jews cruelly persecuted. Arghun's brother and successor Il-Khan Geikhatu (ruled 1291–1295), who personally inclined towards Buddhism, was also favourably disposed towards the Christians. He foundered, however, on the precipitous introduction in 1294 of paper money, in which he followed the example of his uncle Kublai Khan. Since he simultaneously forbade coins, trade collapsed and the cities were abandoned for lack of a food supply. The disaffected population rallied around Prince Baidu (ruled 1295), who was secretly a Christian.[142] But Arghun's son Ghazan called for a rebellion, in which he was actively supported by the fanatical Muslim Nauruz and Islamic factions. After only six months of rule Baidu was executed, and Il-Khan Ghazan (ruled 1295–1304), who had converted from Buddhism to Islam, took the throne. The biographer of Mar Yahballah judged the death of Baidu to be 'the proof that in very truth the abandonment of [the Church by] God had taken place'.[143]

Now the rage and envy of the Muslims towards the Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and Buddhists, which had been building up for decades, was released. Under Nauruz's leadership churches, synagogues, fire temples and Buddhist shrines were systematically destroyed, and Christian and Buddhist monks were massacred.[144] Nauruz had Patriarch Yahballaha III tortured; he was saved from death only by the intervention of the Armenian king Hethum II, after which Ghazan restored him to office. But a few months later Muslim gangs devastated the patriarchal see and the cathedral of Maragha. Nauruz also put back into effect the discriminatory clothing laws, according to which Christians and Jews had to wear a distinctive cloth on their turbans and a special belt.[145] Although Ghazan had the powerful Nauruz executed in 1297 and thus eased the situation somewhat, the political and social outlook for Christians had darkened considerably. Nauruz opened for the Christians of Iran and Mesopotamia the doorway to hell, through which Tamerlane would push them.

Gate to the shrine of Sheik Adi in Lalish, northern Iraq. As mentioned by Thomas of Marga in the ninth century, Lalish was originally a Nestorian monastery, which was seized around the twelfth century by the Yezidi, the so-called devil-worshippers, and elevated to their chief shrine. To the right of the gate's arch there crawls a black snake, symbolizing the principle of evil, which has to be appeased. The Yezidi, who developed a highly syncretistic religion, incorporated Manichaean or Zoroastrian ideas, believing that it was more advantageous to appease the nearby Lucifer than serve the distant God.[63]

The chance for an alliance between the Mongol Il-Khanate and Europe

The Armenian king Hethum I (†1269) travelled to Karakorum as early as 1253, in order to recognize Mongol sovereignty. From then on the Christian kingdoms of Armenia and Georgia were the most reliable allies of the Il-Khans. For them the shared military campaign against the Muslim states had the significance of crusades. But the Christian allies were poor in numbers, which is why Hülägü had sought allies in Western Europe after the loss of Syria to the Mamluks and sent a delegation to Pope Urban IV in 1264.[146] From then on for forty years the proud Mongols were supplicants before the popes and the European kings; the East, all-powerful just a few years before, sought cooperation from the West. Hülägü's successor Abaqa undertook further attempts to rekindle the interest in Palestine that had died out in Europe, and he sent delegations in 1267 and 1269. It was incomprehensible to the Mongols that the eighth crusade, led by King Louis IX of France, made its landing in Tunisia instead of Palestine or Syria.[147] Nevertheless, in 1274 the Il-Khan dispatched Mongol emissaries to the Second Council of Lyons. Their offer of a military alliance represented one of the final opportunities to save the beleaguered Crusaders. But Pope Gregory X (†1276) equivocated and gave Abaqa a non-committal reply. Additional letters to the pope, to King Edward I of England and to James of Aragon in 1276 and 1277 went unanswered.[148]

After the failed attempt to retake Syria in 1281, Abaqa's son and successor Arghun began diplomatic efforts. In the first mission to Pope Honorius IV (†1287) in 1285 the Il-Khan sought an offensive military alliance against Egypt, to attack it from both sides.[149] Two years later, at the recommendation of Patriarch Mar Yahballaha III, Arghun sent the Nestorian vicar general Rabban Bar Sauma, of Öngüt descent, as an envoy to Western Europe. The monk first met Emperor Andronicus II (ruled 1282–1328) in Constantinople and then embarked for Naples. In Rome, where he saw the Mandylion robbed in 1204 by the Crusaders from Constantinople, Pope Honorius had just died, so the cardinals gathered there received him.[150] He explained to them the Asian mission of the Church of the East and that many Mongols, Turkic tribes and Chinese were Christians, among them queens and young princes. With this and subsequent conversations with the newly elected Pope Nicholas IV, he entirely unintentionally awoke the interest of Rome in a mission to China. Rabban Bar Sauma then set out for Paris to visit King Philip the Fair and to Bordeaux to meet King Edward I of England. Although both kings received the Mongol envoy with signs of the greatest respect, they did not want to undertake another crusade, although Arghun had promised that in the case of the conquest of Jerusalem he would have himself baptized there.[151]

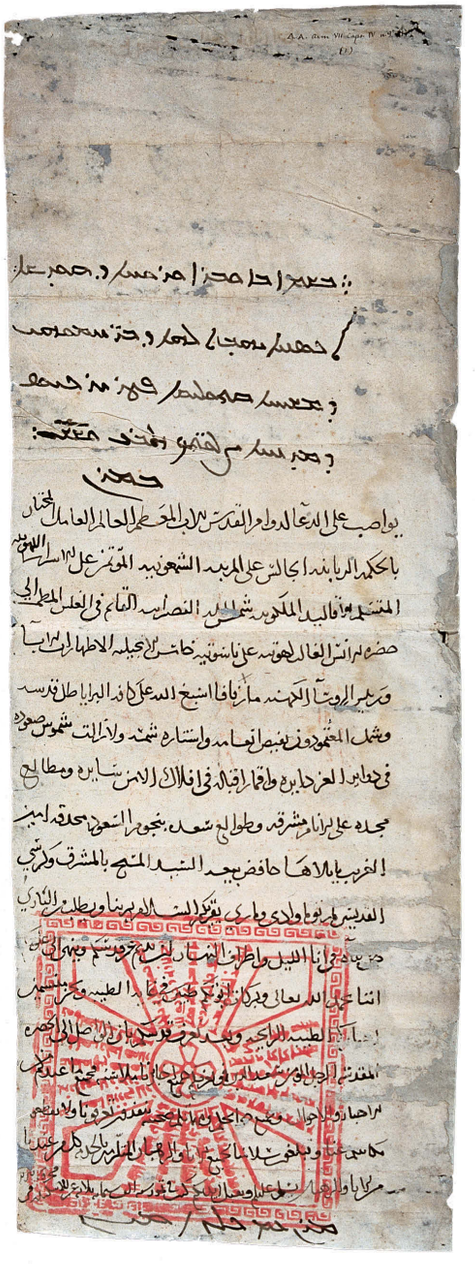
Despite this diplomatic failure, Arghun ordered in 1289 the Genoese Buscarel of Gisolf once more to present to King Philip and King Edward a concrete plan. The letter, written in the Mongol language and Uigur script, referred to Rabban Bar Sauma's mission and declared: 'Calling upon heaven, we will begin a campaign in the last winter month of the year of the panther [January 1291] and set up camp before Damascus around the fifteenth day of the first spring month [20 February 1291]. If you [king] send your troops at the stated time, and we, with the help of heaven, defeat these people and conquer Jerusalem, we will hand it over to you. If your troops arrive late, what good will this plan be?'[152] Once again no alliance came to pass. In 1290, in light of the indeterminate responses, Arghun undertook a fourth and final attempt and dispatched the Christian officer Zagan. At the same time as Zagan was holding forth in Europe the last Crusader fortress, in Acre, fell to the Mamluks,

on 28 May 1291, and thus the last Christian bridgehead in Palestine was lost. The age of the Crusades had finally come to an end.

Although the Christian princes consistently rejected the Mongol offers of alliance, after his unsuccessful delegation of 1299 the Muslim Il-Khan Ghazan, who was involved in an ongoing border war with the Mamluks, made one last attempt in 1302. He promised Pope Boniface VIII, King Edward I of England and James II of Aragon that in the event of a military alliance against Egypt he would renounce Islam and be baptized.[153] This opportunity also passed by untaken, and in 1303 Ghazan suffered a complete defeat at Damascus. In light of the obvious lack of European interest in an anti-Islamic alliance, Ghazan remained a Muslim. The next diplomatic initiative, made by Il-Khan Oljeitu (ruled 1304–1316) in 1305, sought from King Philip the Fair of France no longer an alliance but, instead, just friendly relations.[154] And so the window of opportunity for a possible re-Christianization of the region that is now Iran and Iraq closed for ever, sealing the long-term fate of the Christians there.

Rabban Bar Sauma and Rabban Markos – Nestorian 'Marco Polos' from Asia

At the same time as the Polos were living in China a Nestorian Öngüt travelled from Beijing to Baghdad, Constantinople, Rome and France, where he met the pope and two kings – he was a kind of Asian Marco Polo in reverse. He was Rabban Bar Sauma, who was born around 1225, the son of Shiban, the Öngüt visitor subordinate to the bishop – living in Khan Baliq.[155] Although his parents had him married, 'he [as a twenty-year-old] cast off the shadows of this world'.[156] He received the tonsure from Metropolitan Giwargis and shut himself up in a cell for seven years, after which he moved to a cave near the *Monastery of the Cross* in the Fang-shan district south of the capital. After a few years the son of the archdeacon of Olon Sume, whose name was Markos, came to the hermit with the desire to



The 1302 letter of the patriarch of the Church of the East, Mar Yahballaha III (in office 1281–1317), to Pope Boniface VIII. The cruciform, red seal of the patriarch is in the Uigur language and Syriac script. It confirms in the name of the Great Khan Möngke the authority of the patriarch over all Christians and decrees that no Christian may travel to the Great Khan without a letter stamped with the patriarchal seal. (Vatican Secret Archives, A. A. Arm. I-XVIII, 1800, 1.)[64]

Upper section of the front of a Nestorian stone stele in Fang Shan, China. The seven characters state: 'To proclaim on this stele the imperial edict that this is the Monastery of the Cross.' At the very top a cross is clearly visible. In the district of Fang Shan, which lies c. fifty kilometres south-west of Beijing, two stone blocks and two large inscribed steles were found in 1919. Both blocks bear a cross on the front, and one features four Syriac inscriptions, as well. One of them quotes Psalm 34:5 from the Peshitta: 'Look to him and hope in him'.[65] The smaller of the two steles dates from 960 and celebrates the reconstruction of the monastery, completed in 952. This new monastery was Buddhist; the religious affiliation of the old one was not given. The larger, 273-centimetre-high stele is inscribed on both sides. The front, dating from 1365, reports on the restoration of the monastery completed in 1357. It states that 'a long time ago a [Christian?] priest from the western lands came here' – did that happen during the time of the Tang Dynasty – that is, before 907? In conclusion, the calligraphic inscription praises the wise edict of Emperor Timur (ruled 1333–1368), who enabled the reconstruction of the Nestorian monastery. The back side, from 1382, reports that inhabitants of the surrounding villages had set right the stele, which had fallen down.[66]

become a monk. In 1263 Markos was ordained as a monk by Metropolitan Nestorius and lived with his teacher in the hermitage of the cross. Some fifteen years later they departed on a pilgrimage to the graves of the saints and patriarchs in Mesopotamia and to Jerusalem. Following, so to speak, in the footsteps of Marco Polo, they travelled to Tangut, Khotan and Kashgar, later to Talas in the Land of Seven Rivers and to Tus in Khorassan, and then to Maragha to meet Patriarch Dinkha I. They journeyed on and visited the most important monasteries and pilgrimage sites of Mesopotamia, but the dangerous situation on the western border prevented them from reaching their final goal of Jerusalem.

In 1280 Mar Dinkha summoned them to return, for he had other plans: 'This is not the time for a journey to Jerusalem. You have received blessings of all the Houses of God and the relics which are in them. When a man visits them with a pure heart, the service thus paid to them is in no way less than that of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. I have now decided to consecrate Markos metropolitan of Cathai and Ong [which is northern China and the Öngüt]. As for Rabban Bar Sauma, I'm going to make you vicar general, and I'm going to send the two of you back to your own country.'[157] He gave to Markos the new name Yahballaha, which means 'divinely given'. Wars in Central Asia made their return trip impossible, so they waited in a monastery near Mosul. But when Mar Dinkha died soon thereafter, the electing body, acting out of political considerations, chose the Turko-Mongol Yahballaha as the new patriarch. Abaqa confirmed the election and gave him the seal that Great Khan Möngke had granted as a sign of the authority of the patriarchal see. The new patriarch Yahballaha III was installed on 2 November 1281.

When Arghun asked Mar Yahballaha for a suitable ambassador to Western Europe in 1287, he recommended his one-time companion Rabban Bar Sauma. During his first visit to Rome, the Nestorian vicar general presented the gathering of cardinals with an unimpeachable Dyophysite creed: 'In His [Christ's] divinity He is eternally of the Father; in His humanity he was born in time of Mary; the union is inseparable and indivisible for ever. The Son of this union is perfect God and perfect man – two natures and two hypostases in one parsopa.'[158] When the cardinals accepted this Christological declaration – although it was heretical in the Catholic context – and sought to question Rabban Sauma about the disputed *filioque*, he fended them off with the statement: 'I have come from remote countries neither to discuss nor to instruct in matters of the Faith, but I came that I might make known the words of King [Arghun] and the Catholicos.'[159]

Aerial view of the citadel of Arbil (Arbela), northern Iraq, in which Nestorian refugees and protective troops barricaded themselves from 1297 to 1310.

Half a year later the bitterly disappointed Rabban Bar Sauma returned to Rome, as neither the king of France nor the king of England had shown concrete interest in conquering Jerusalem with the Mongols. Although the newly elected Pope Nicholas IV permitted the Mongol vicar general to participate in all the services of the Holy Week and celebrate a Mass in Rome according to the Nestorian rite, he, too, made no commitment. Rabban Bar Sauma died in 1294 in Baghdad.

Mar Yahballaha's stormy patriarchate was marked by the struggle for the preservation of the Church of the East and for the safety of the Christians. After he avoided death under Il-Khan Ahmed only thanks to the intervention of the mother of the king, Qutui Khatun, a dozen peaceful years went by before the seizure of power by Ghazan, who commanded the destruction of all non-Muslim houses of worship. The patriarch was imprisoned and tortured, and this time he owed his life to King Hethum II of Armenia, who was then in Maragha. After Mar Yahballaha was permitted to return to his position in 1296, Muslims plundered and destroyed his patriarchal residence and forced him to flee. Simultaneously Nauruz tried, with help from Kurds, to drive the Nestorians out of the fortified citadel of the city of Arbil. When Ghazan deprived the fanatical Nauruz of power, the situation eased somewhat. Now the Il-Khan suggested to the patriarch that the Christians leave the mighty citadel, as well as the city of Arbil, and settle in another location. But Arbil was the last base of the beleaguered Christians.

In his reply the despairing patriarch recounted the places he had been forced to flee, namely Baghdad and Maragha, after which he lamented the fate of other churches: 'In Tabriz there remains only a flat plot of ground with no building on it; in Hamadan, it is impossible to point the place whereon the monastery and the church stood. There remain now the monastery and the church of Arbil and one hundred souls. Do you wish to scatter them also and to plunder them? What is the good of life to me? Let my lord the king command either that I return to the East, whence I came, or that I go to the country of the Franks and bring my life to an end there.'[160] Ghazan relented, and the Nestorians retained their fortress.

Since Ghazan, beginning in 1299, again sought an alliance with Europe, he adopted a more favourable attitude towards the Christians, which allowed Mar Yahballaha to rebuild the cathedral and patriarchal residence of Maragha. With time there even developed a friendly relationship between Ghazan, who consistently promoted the Islamicization of Iran, and the Mongol patriarch, which culminated in the Il-Khan's visiting Maragha in 1303 and giving him a golden cross containing a splinter from the True Cross. Pope Boniface VIII (in office 1294–1303) had sent it to the Muslim ruler as a token of his respect.[161]

In this relatively peaceful period the patriarch commissioned the leading theologian of the time, Mar Odisho (†1318), metropolitan of Nisibis and Armenia, to write an easily comprehensible catechism. In 1297/1298 Bishop Ebedjesus, as he was known in the West, produced *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*.[162] This and additional works of canon and civil law were declared binding by the Synod of 1318. Ghazan's diplomatic contact with Europe enabled Mar Yahballaha to take up the initiative of Patriarch Sabrisho V (in office 1226–1256), who in 1247 had proposed unity in prayer to Pope Innocent IV. Political considerations inspired the patriarch to seek a form of union with Rome.

The three-storey, 51-metre-high mausoleum of Il-Khan Oljaitu (ruled 1304–1316) in Sultaniyeh, Iran. The diameter of the cupola measures 26 metres. Oljaitu, whom Patriarch Mar Yahballaha III had baptized with the name Nicholas, was a stern Muslim and contributed substantially to the decline of the Church of the East.

First, in 1302, he gave to Ghazan's envoy, the Christian Saad ad-Daula, a letter to Pope Boniface VIII, in which he proposed a rapprochement between the two Churches.[163]

Two years later in Maragha he gave the Dominican Jacob of Arles-sur-Tech a creed written in Arabic for the attention of Pope Benedict XI (in office 1303–1304), which Jacob translated into Latin. A comparison of the two texts shows that Brother Jacob adapted his translation to the expectations of the Catholic Church.[164] The Arabic text confirms the Nicene Creed and calls Jesus Christ 'a complete God and a complete man'. Although the patriarch avoided speaking of two hypostases, he underscored the East Syrian conviction that the divinity of Christ was unaffected by the suffering of his humanity on the

cross. The acceptance in the Latin translation of the *filioque* is not found in the Arabic original. Thus, the patriarch had not abandoned the foundation of Nestorian orthodoxy. However, he acknowledged the pre-eminence of the pope before all Christian religious leaders and the fact that he '[occupies] the See of Peter, of the representative of Jesus Christ for all children of the apostolic church from the Orient to the Occident'.[165] Mar Yahballaha's letter brought no result.

When Oljeitu (ruled 1304–1316) acceded to the throne, Mar Yahballaha was delighted, as he had baptized him with the name Nicholas. But he was disappointed, since the prince had converted to Islam and soon began to persecute the Christians. In 1306 the endangered patriarch sought refuge in the fortress of Arbil, but in early 1310 Mongol troops and Kurds forced him to leave the citadel, whereupon it was conquered after a siege of several months and the Christians were either massacred or sold into slavery.[166] Yahballaha fled to Maragha, where he died in 1317. In his 36 years in office the patriarch consecrated 75 bishops and metropolitans and defended to the best of his ability the Christians entrusted to him. But he could not prevent the steady Islamicization of Iran and the long-term decline of his Church in its heartland.

The ravages of Tamerlane and the retreat to the mountains of Kurdistan

After Yahballaha the bishops elected the metropolitan of the devastated province of Arbil, who took the name Timothy II (in office 1318–1332). Two years earlier the twelve-year-old Abu Sa'id (ruled 1316–1335) had been chosen as the seventh Il-Khan, but power lay with Emir Choban, who protected the Christians. The relatively calm situation enabled Pope John XXII to found the short-lived diocese of Sultaniyeh in 1318. After

The Nestorian cemetery in Göktepe, district of Urmiah, Iran. The custom in Nestorian and Chaldean cemeteries of adding to the grave the stone figure of a ram goes back to a Mongol tradition. It is also found in old graves in Mongolia and Kazakhstan.[67] Presumably this tradition goes back to the ancient Chinese practice of placing in princely graveyards avenues of stone figures, the so-called 'paths of the soul'. Similar stone figures are found in the Christian cemetery of Khosrow Abad near Delemon, Azerbaijan, and in the Historical Museum of Maragha, both in Iran.

Choban's overthrow in 1327 the persecutions began again; Mar Yahballaha's monastery in Maragha was converted into a mosque. The power struggle that broke out after the death of Abu Sa'id and the absence of a central government further aggravated the situation of the Christians, who now became victims of local warlords and gangs of thieves. For this reason the patriarchal see moved with the officeholder's residence, wherever he felt safe. This occurred within the triangle formed by Mosul in the south, Lake Urmiah in the east and Lake Van in the west. As a result of these numerous moves, there are hardly any historical documents from the period between 1350 and 1550; in the case of a few patriarchs not even the precise term in office is known. At the same time, the margin-

alized Nestorians of Mesopotamia left the fertile planes of the Euphrates and the Tigris to relocate in inhospitable Kurdistan and Iranian Azerbaijan. Many converted to Islam.

It was Tamerlane (ruled 1370–1405), who was of Turkic descent, who dealt the deathblow to the ravaged Church of the East. The Muslim Tamerlane had the military genius of Genghis Khan and exceeded him in cruelty, as attested to by the infamous skull pyramids he had erected upon the conquest of cities. However, he lacked the religious tolerance of the Mongol great khans, for he profoundly hated Christians and Jews. Thus Tamerlane combined Turko-Mongol lust for conquest with Islamic fanaticism. Beginning around 1370 he expanded his realm across Central Asia, and in 1380 he invaded the former Il-Khanate. Everywhere churches and synagogues were destroyed and Christians and Jews massacred – a genuine holocaust occurred among the Christians and Jews of Asia. Then Tamerlane's grandson Ulug Beg (viceroy of Transoxania 1409–47, r. 1447–49) exterminated the last remaining Christians of Samarqand.[167] Towards the end of the fourteenth century the Church of the East collapsed and virtually disappeared from the region around Baghdad, after it had been extinguished in China, Mongolia, Central Asia and Iran (except for the region around Urmiah). After some eleven centuries of expansion, Christianity shrank back to the land east of the Euphrates, to its geographical origins. The Church survived only in inaccessible Kurdistan, in Iranian Azerbaijan, in Armenia and in Kerala, which escaped Tamerlane's orgy of destruction for reasons of climate and geography.

In the fifteenth century the established organization of the Church collapsed, so in 1450 Patriarch Shimun IV Basidi (in office 1437–1497) made the patriarchate hereditary. From then on the office was to be reserved for the Abuna family and passed on from uncle to nephew or, more rarely, to a younger brother. In exceptional cases a child was appointed and a relative such as the mother or an older sister oversaw Church affairs until the designated leader came of age.[168] Soon the offices of metropolitan and bishop also became hereditary. Through the heritability of offices the determination of successors was simplified and also better protected from external manipulations. Since these high clerical offices were connected with particular families and sometimes held by family leaders, the organization of the Church became increasingly intertwined with the clan structures of the faithful. True to the old form of organisation, the patriarch was the ecclesiastical and secular authority in one, although he had to share worldly power with the clan leaders and the Muslim Kurdish emirs of his region.

In the end, the Church of the East had to organize itself as a people in order to survive. Thus there emerged from the rubble of the erstwhile international Church, which had embraced numerous peoples and races, a regional Church structured according to tribal principles. The presence of the Church of the East became congruent with a certain region and a single people, the Assyrians. Not until half a millennium later could the Church free itself from the chains of a hereditary clergy.

X The Thomas Christians of South India

The East Syrian community on the Malabar Coast

The first contact between the Thomas Christians of South India and the Church of the East occurred around 300, after which they were hierarchically integrated into the Iranian metropolitan see of Rew Ardashir in the early fifth century.[1] Patriarch Ishoyahb III (in office 650–660) then elevated the India dioceses to the metropolitan see of India, directly under his authority, whose seat was in Angamali in the sixteenth century.[2] As the copper documents from the eighth/ninth centuries show, the Thomas Christians were fully integrated into Indian society and enjoyed the protection of local princes. Their prosperity was based on their pepper plantations and the trade encouraged by the increasing significance of the port city of Quilon. Beginning in the ninth century Quilon was the most important port in south-western India and both Persian ships and Chinese junks put in there, which resulted in contact between the East Syrians of Quilon and those of Zaitun in China in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Thanks to the significance of Quilon and the purported apostle's grave near Mylapore on the east coast of India, many Western European travellers came into contact with the Thomas Christians. Among the earliest was the Anglo-Saxon bishop Sigehelm of Sherbourne, whom King Alfred the Great of England (†899) sent to Mylapore around 885.[3] Between 1291 and 1293 two prominent Europeans visited Quilon and Mylapore: first Bishop Montecorvino on his way to China, and then Marco Polo on his return trip to Venice. Montecorvino's companion, the Franciscan missionary Nicholas of Pistoia, died

Nestorian fishermen in Kerala, southern India. Christian fishermen are proud of their religious affiliation for two reasons: first, Jesus Christ called his first earthly successor Peter, the 'fisher of men';[68] and, second, Christianity enables escape from the lower social classes of the caste system.

in Mylapore and was buried there in the East Syrian Church of St Thomas.[4] When Pope John XXII resolved to carry out a mission to Iran and founded the diocese of Sultaniyeh in 1318, he sent the Dominican Jordanus Catalani to India. Around 1324 Jordanus visited the Nestorians of Thana, part of modern Mumbai (Bombay), and the nearby city of Sopara, where he boasted that he had converted 'more than 10,000 schismatic infidels'.[5] Even if Jordanus greatly exaggerated, his report indicates that there were still Nestorians in north-western India in the fourteenth century. When he returned to India the pope appointed him bishop of Quilon in 1329, and gave him a letter demanding that the leader of the Thomas Christians acknowledge the authority of Rome.[6]

Some twenty years after Jordanus, in 1348, the Franciscan bishop John of Marignolli (†1357) spent several months in Quilon. Regarding the Nestorians, he reported that they owned all the pepper plantations and held the public office of weights and measures; clearly, the privileges documented on the copper tablets were still in effect.[7] Later, around 1430, the Venetian merchant Nicolo Conti (†1469) described the grave of Thomas in Mylapore.[8] These reports, which also suggest the existence of Christian ministers and even kings, allowed for the development of the notion that the priest-king John could be found in South India. On the basis of these expectations, Vasco da Gama is said to have declared upon his arrival in Calicut (Kozhikode), 'We have come seeking Christians and spices.'[9] Da Gama was mistaken, however, when he took the Hindu Brahmans for Christians and their temples for churches. The Portuguese Pedro Alvares Cabral was the first to meet real Christians, which he did near Cochin in 1500.

A Syrian letter from 1504 offers us a glimpse into the situation of the Thomas Christians at that time. It reports that the community included about 30,000 families – that is, 150,000 to 200,000 people. In 1490 they sent 'three pious men' to Patriarch Mar Shimun IV (in office 1437–1497) in northern Mesopotamia with a request for bishops. Two of the envoys reached their goal and were ordained as priests by the patriarch, whereupon he also consecrated two monks as bishops and gave them the names Thomas and John. All four reached Kerala. After a few years Bishop Thomas returned to Mesopotamia, whereupon Patriarch Elias V (in office 1502–1503) consecrated one monk as Metropolitan Yahballaha and two other monks as bishops James and George, who all returned to India in 1504. Because of their initiative, new churches were built and the grave of Thomas in Mylapore was restored. The letter goes on to report 'that the king of the Christians of the West, the Franks, our brothers, sent to this

A Christian worship service in Kerala, southern India.

A Christian portraying Jesus in a street parade in Kerala. Here Christianity is also expressed in the form of large processions with tens of thousands of participants.

country powerful ships, which reached the town of Calicut'.[10] These 'brothers with their mighty ships' were Cabral and Vasco da Gama, who returned to South India in 1502. The Thomas Christians did not feel threatened by the militarily superior Portuguese; quite the opposite: they hoped for their protection in the face of the attacking Muslims. For this reason they sent a delegation to da Gama in November 1502 and placed themselves under the protection of the Portuguese crown. This alliance was very welcome to the Portuguese, since the Thomas Christians could provide over 25,000 soldiers in times of danger. The Muslim traders responded to this Christian alliance and to the encroachment by the Portuguese into their trade monopoly with the plundering of Quilon in 1505 and 1524.

The forced conversion of Nestorians to Catholicism

During the first decades following the establishment of the Portuguese trading settlements relations with the Thomas Christians were quite harmonious, since the first Portuguese settlers were merchants rather than missionaries. Additionally, the Catholic priests did not know Syriac at first, so they did not notice the 'Nestorian heresies'. The Thomas Christians could for a time retain their religious identity and their connection to the Church of the East under the leadership of their bishop James (†1552), who had come from Mesopotamia. The troubles began with the arrivals of Brother Alvaro Penteado in Goa in 1511, the Portuguese bishop João de Albuquerque in 1538 and the Jesuit Francis Xavier (†1552) in 1542. They despised both the Hindu heathens and the East Syrian Thomas Christians and began, with the help of the Portuguese civil authorities, to pressure the Nestorians to renounce their Eastern ideas of faith, adopt the Latin rite and acknowledge the authority of the pope. Since the Thomas Christians fiercely defended themselves against the Latinization of their Church and its rites, the Portuguese fleet, which controlled the sea lanes west of Kerala, tried to break the link to the Church of the East, in order to prevent the arrival of Nestorian bishops from Mesopotamia. The Nestorian bishop Mar Dinkha, who lived in Cranganore, feared for his life, or at least his freedom, and fled inland to Angamali in 1534.

At the same time, Catholic missionaries carried out well-targeted mass conversions among poor Indian fishermen, who belonged to the lower castes and hoped their acceptance of the Catholic faith would enable them to break free from the chains of the Indian caste system. The Catholic missionaries cleverly exploited the gap left open

by the Thomas Christians, who were associated with a higher caste and had never made an active missionary effort among the lower classes. Thus did the Catholics create a clergy parallel to the Nestorians. Simultaneously, the Inquisition, demanded by Francis Xavier, began its terrifying work in 1560.

The situation became still more complicated when part of the Mesopotamian Church of the East entered into union with Rome in 1553 under the leadership of John Sulaqa and established the rival patriarchate of the Chaldean Catholic Church. Sulaqa led it under the name of John VIII (†1555). Shortly before the Latin diocese of Goa was elevated to an archdiocese in 1558 the Chaldean patriarch John VIII, acting on the authority of a papal bull that had been granted to him, send the Chaldean bishops Mar Elias and Mar Joseph to Goa, where they arrived in 1555. While Mar Elias soon left India, the Portuguese authorities handed Mar Joseph over to the Inquisition, which twice sent him to Rome to clarify his orthodoxy. Only two years later the Nestorian patriarch Shimun VIII Dinkha (in office 1551–1558) dispatched Bishop Mar Abraham, who was at first able to elude the grasp of the watchful Portuguese. But he was arrested on account of the initiative of his Chaldean rival Mar Joseph and handed over to the Inquisition. In a genuine odyssey, he fled from his captivity in Mozambique to Mosul, whereupon he travelled voluntarily to Rome and pretended to have accepted the Catholic creed. Around 1565 he returned to South India, after the pope had divided the diocese of the Thomas Christians between Mar Joseph and him. After the second deportation of the Chaldean bishop Joseph, Mar Abraham publicly professed the East Syrian rite and fled to Angamali, where he died in office in 1597. Then, in accordance with East Syrian custom, Archdeacon George of the Cross led the Indian archdiocese of the Church of the East.[11]

Thus in the second half of the sixteenth century there were three Christian hierarchies in India – the Nestorian, the Chaldean Catholic and the Roman Catholic – which operated beside and against one another. The Catholic archbishop of Goa, Alexis de Menezes, appointed in 1597, decided to 'resolve' the turbulent situation in the spirit of the Portuguese administration through the complete Latinization of the Thomas Christians. He behaved like a Crusader battling the infidels rather than a diplomat seeking compromise. Under pain of military force, dispossession and excommunication, he convened the Synod of Dyamper (Udayamperu) near Cochin, after he had ordained over one hundred priests in order to ensure himself a majority. During this one-week blitz-synod Menezes forced through 267 decrees, including, among others, the decisions of the Council of Ephesus and the condemnations of the Church Fathers Theodore, Diodore and Nestorius, as

The Orthodox Syrian Church of Nivanam, Kerala, was, according to tradition, one of the seven churches of India founded by the apostle Thomas in the year 52. The building standing today was erected in 1910.

Presumably the oldest book preserved in Kerala is the Nomocanon, the book of monastic rules by Bar Hebraus (1226–1286). The colophon bears the date 1290. (Library of the Orthodox Syrian Church of St John in Pampakuda, Kerala, southern India.)

well as their own patriarch. The synod adopted the Latin liturgy, adapted the sacraments to the Latin model, acknowledged belief in purgatory and the characterization of Mary as Theotokos and instituted priestly celibacy, which meant that those East Syrian priests who wanted to stay in office had to divorce their wives. The synod then acknowledged the sole primacy of the pope, which removed India from the authority of the Chaldean Catholic patriarch and reduced the metropolitan see of Angamali to a suffragan diocese of Goa. Finally, all the manuscripts of the Thomas Christians were systematically collected and burned, which amounted to the cultural destruction of a 1300-year-old Christian tradition. Thus the only branch of the Church of the East to escape Tamerlane's frenzy of destruction was annihilated by Europeans. This auto-da-fé is the primary reason the history of the Thomas Christians remains filled with question marks.

With these events the last Nestorian metropolitan see 'of the Exterior' ceased to exist; the so-called Syrian Malabar Church was merely a daughter Church of Rome. Rome met East Syrian ideas and customs not with its own ideas and understanding but with brute force. Under Christian rule the Thomas Christians lost the level of freedom of belief and conscience they had enjoyed under the 'heathen' Hindus.[12]

The revolt of the Thomas Christians at the Cross of Koonan

Although the submission of the Thomas Christians to Rome at first appeared complete, it did not last long. The reckless Latinization of their Church, the installation of Latin bishops and the arrogant behaviour of the Jesuits offended the faithful. Around 1650 they elected as archdeacon Thomas Palakomatta (†1670), who prohibited the Jesuit missionaries from entering the East Syrian churches and at the same time asked the Nestorian, Jacobite and Coptic patriarchs to send a non-Latin bishop. The East Syrian patriarch Mar Elias VIII Shimun (in office 1617–1660) sent Bishop Mar Ahatallah to India, where the Portuguese arrested him and handed him over to the Inquisition in Goa. The unfortunate bishop died at the stake in 1653.[13] The enraged Thomas Christians then gathered in Cochin at the Cross of Koonan and swore no longer to recognize papal authority and to expel the Jesuits. They decided that twelve priests should consecrate Archdeacon Thomas as the new bishop, which they did in the Church of Alangad. The overwhelming majority of the faithful supported the separation from Rome, which was made easier by the Dutch conquest of Quilon in 1661, Cranganore in 1662 and finally Cochin in 1663, since the Protestant Dutch expelled the Latin bishops, priests and mission-

Fishing nets adopted from China and used by Christians in Cochin, Kerala, recall Kerala's trade with China, which flourished until the fifteenth century.

aries from their territories.

The expulsion of the Portuguese saved Bishop Thomas from the flames of the Inquisition. Pope Alexander VII (in office 1655–1667) blamed the Jesuits for the debacle of the Oath of Koonan and sent in their place Carmelite monks led by Joseph Sebastiani. By means of threats and bribes, he succeeded in returning a minority of the Thomas Christians to the pale of the Catholic Church. Because Bishop Thomas refused to give up his office and acknowledge the authority of the pope, Bishop Sebastiani had Portuguese soldiers search for the obstinate cleric in order to hand him over to the Inquisition in Goa. When they threatened to arrest him in the Church of Mulamthuruty the endangered bishop traded clothing with a layman and escaped. Since the Dutch expelled the Portuguese soon thereafter, Bishop Joseph Sebastiani consecrated the native Alexander Palakomatta as bishop of the Catholic Syrian Malabar Church. But Palakomatta was a cousin of the rebellious Bishop Thomas.[14] Although the majority of the Christians stood behind their Bishop Thomas, his position remained disputable on account of his irregular consecration by only priests, so he appealed again to the Coptic and the two Syrian patriarchs. This time the Syrian Orthodox bishop Mor Gregorius reached India in 1665, where he consecrated him again as Bishop Thomas I and introduced the Jacobite rite. That a Nestorian archdeacon was consecrated bishop by a Jacobite prelate indicates that the Thomas Christians were much less concerned with Christological questions than

with the defence of Syrian traditions and their antipathy towards the Latin Christians.

Because of this consecration, there was a hierarchical and legitimate connection of part of the Thomas Christians to Antioch, which simultaneously implied the dissolution of the bond with the East Syrian patriarchate. This development laid the cornerstone for the mosaic of various Churches that exists in Kerala today, since there were then three parallel hierarchies: first, the Syrian Malankara Orthodox Church, which was dependent on Antioch; second, the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, recognized by Rome but autonomous; and, third, the community of Latin Christians, which included the Hindus converted by European missionaries and the descendants of these converts.

The Oriental Christians of South India found no peace in the eighteenth century either. It seems that Syrian Malankar Christians, who rejected the West Syrian rite, appealed again to the Nestorian patriarch. In 1701 one Bishop Mar Simon reached Kerala, where the Catholic Inquisition arrested him and imprisoned him until his death.[15] Seven years later the Nestorian bishop Mar Gabriel arrived; he oversaw the 22 Syrian Malankar parishes from his residence in Kottayam and died there in 1731.[16] After Mar Gabriel's death, the East Syrian patriarch sent Bishop John to Kerala in order to grant episcopal consecration to the native priest Thomas. But this did not occur, since the Hindu ruler of Cochin had him arrested on the instigation of the Catholics.[17] A further crisis arose in 1774, when the Syrian Malankar bishop Mor Koorilose, whose consecration had not been properly carried out, founded the independent church of Thozhiyur. Later the massacres of Thomas Christians by Muslim and Hindu rulers severely tested the communities.[18]

The arrival of Protestant missionaries, who built their first church in 1809, and Anglican priests led to another split. The Syrian Malankar metropolitan Mar Athanasius (in office 1843–1877) implemented far-reaching Anglican-inspired reforms, resulting in schism and the founding in 1888 of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar with its see at Tiruvalla. As his first acts, Mar Athanasius translated the liturgy from Syriac into the native language of Malayalam and abolished Masses for the dead, the use of incense and the invocation of saints and Mary. In the Mar Thoma Church belief in transubstantiation is also rejected, and the sacraments are limited to baptism, Eucharist and holy orders. Scripture is given a more prominent place, and the Eucharist is open to all Christians: 'The Lord's table is open to all, only Christ may turn someone away.'[19] The Mar Thoma Church, which today includes ten bishops, a thousand priests and about 800,000 laypeople, features an unusual organization. While the bishops' synod, presided over by the patriarch, is responsible for doctrine and dogma, an assembly of delegates from the faithful, called *Sabha Prathinidhi Mandalam*, oversees Church business. Each parish delegates one to five elected representatives, plus the vicar, and when there are two or more lay representatives they must include a woman. The Mandalam, which resembles a parliament, thus consists mostly of laity. In the process of making decisions, the bishops' synod and the patriarch can either put a resolution of the delegates' assembly into effect or reject it, in which case it will be treated again. If the Mandalam confirms its decision and the patriarch again vetoes it, he must dissolve it and call for new elections. Then the newly elected parliament finally resolves the disputed matter in its first session.[20]

At the beginning of the twentieth century a conflict in the leadership of the Syrian Orthodox Church led to a division in the Indian daughter Church that persists to this day. In 1912 the deposed patriarch of Antioch, Abd el-Massiah II, consecrated the first independent catholicos of South India, Mor Basilios Paulos I, while another

group of Syrian Orthodox Christians remained loyal to the legitimate patriarch of Antioch. Legal battles over Church property began immediately. In 1930 a minority of the autocephalous group under the mystic Mor Ivanios joined the Roman Catholic Church, from which emerged the Syro-Malankar Catholic Church. The reunification of the two Jacobite Churches, which succeeded in 1964, was short-lived, as eleven years later the patriarch in Antioch excommunicated Catholicos Mor Basilios Augin I and named as his replacement Mor Basilios Paulos II (†1996). Since then two catholicoi have competed in Kerala; the Church loyal to Antioch calls itself the Syrian Orthodox Church, and the autocephalous Church the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. Together the two Churches number two to three million members. Unfortunately, the renewed schism of 1975 brought violence and further legal debates about the ownership of churches. In 1995 the High Court of India decided for the autocephalous Church, since there could be only one catholicos and one Church association in India. Because the court did not address the apportioning of churches in detail, there are, as the author observed in 2001, still many churches that have been closed since 1975; lack of maintenance threatens them with collapse.[21] It is certainly no benefit to the image of Christianity in India that two long-established Churches cannot find a compromise and must instead call upon the civil authorities. It appears that a few dignitaries expend more energy before the court than before the altar. The dispute is all the more fallacious given that the liturgy in the two Churches is identical and the quarrel is only over property, titles and power.

The Orthodox-Syrian bishop Mor Pachomios in front of his Cathedral of St Mary in Aluwa, Kerala, which, on account of an intra-Syrian-Orthodox legal dispute, has been closed by law since 1975. He wears the bulbous headdress typical of Miaphysite bishops.

The rebuilding of the Church of the East in India

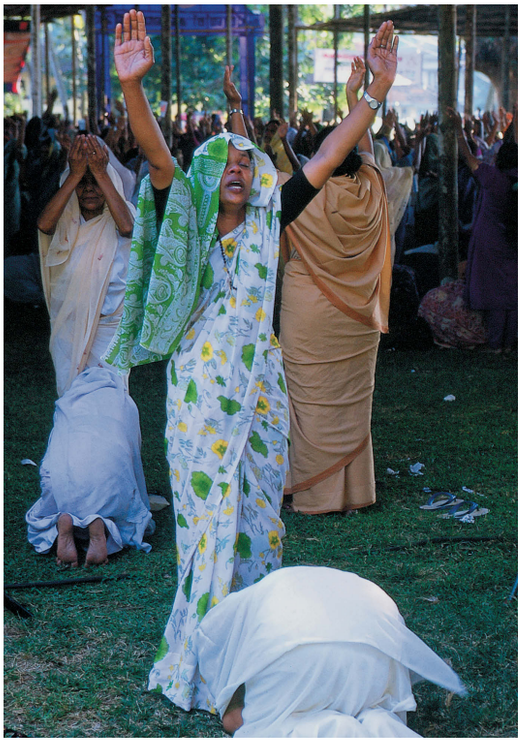
It is not without irony that one of the youngest ecclesiastical groups of South India is the successor to the oldest, the Nestorian Church. In 1856 unhappy members of the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church appealed to the Chaldean patriarch Mar Joseph VI Audo (in office 1848–1878), who saw an opportunity to expand his jurisdiction to the Thomas Christians. Despite the fervent protest of the Vatican, he sent the patriarchal vicar Thomas Rokos in 1860 and Bishop Elias Mellus in 1874, who established a Chaldean hierarchy in the region of Trichur. Upon his return in 1882 the native priest Antonius Thondanatta (†1900) became his successor as metropolitan of the Chaldean Syrian Church of Trichur, under the name Mar Odisho. Because, however, the Chaldean patriarch had in the interim submitted again to Rome and could not name a successor for Mar Odisho, the leaderless

The Cathedral of St Mary in Trichur, built in 1814, is the see of the Indian metropolitan of the Church of the East. It is an outstanding example of Indian–Syrian church architecture.

community of Trichur appealed to the Nestorian patriarch Mar Shimun XIX, who sent them the bishop and metropolitan Mar Timothy (1878–1945) from Kurdistan in 1907.[22]

But the small, now Nestorian community of Trichur found no peace, as their metropolitan became involved in the fight over hereditary succession to the patriarchate. When Patriarch Shimun XX Paulose died in 1920, the sister of the late patriarch, Surma, had her twelve-year-old nephew consecrated as Patriarch Mar Shimun XXI Eshai (in office 1920–1975) before Metropolitan Timothy, who was travelling from India, arrived in Baghdad. Since Timothy was the best-educated and most senior bishop of the church, those Assyrians who did not accept hereditary succession and the election of a child as their leader rallied around him. As a compromise Timothy was appointed regent. But Lady Surma (†1975), who did not want to surrender the power of Church leadership to the regent, plotted with the British authorities against the regent and in the summer of 1927 brought about his deportation to India. After his death in 1945 the diocese remained vacant for seven years.[23]

The new bishop, Mar Thoma Darmo (†1969) was likewise a determined opponent of hereditary succession, which brought him into conflict with Patriarch Mar Shimun XXI Eshai. The conflict broke out openly when Mar Shimun instituted reforms without any corresponding synodal resolution. First Mar Shimun suspended the rebellious metropolitan Mar Thoma Darmo in 1964. In 1968 Mar Thoma Darmo consecrated three priests as bishops and metropolitans, whereupon these newly appointed bishops named him rival patriarch of the Ancient Church of the East a week later; Mar Shimun, however, declared them deposed. One of the three new bishops was George Mooken from Trichur, born in 1940, who took the name Mar Aprem and was appointed metropolitan of



Metropolitan of the Church of the East of India, Mar Timothy II, who died on 7 August 2001. Since a bishop, like an apostle, remains in office spiritually after his death, he is placed immediately after his death in full regalia upon his Episcopal throne, so that he can continue to bless the faithful from whom he has taken his leave.

A Prathana-gathering of charismatic Christians in Cochin, southern India. Each person venerates the divine in others.

India. The new schism was especially painful in the East Syrian communities of India, as Mar Shimun XXI elevated Mar Timothy (1920–2001) to metropolitan of India for the Church of the East in 1971. There were now two Nestorian metropolitans in the small diocese.

The abolition of patriarchal hereditary succession in 1976 opened the way to reconciliation. Although power conflicts have prevented to this day a universal reunification of the two Nestorian Churches, reunion was accomplished in India in 1995. The metropolitan see is again entirely under the patriarch of the Church of the East, Mar Dinkha IV (in office since 1976). While Mar Aprem oversees the business of the Church, Mar Timothy, who died in 2001, led the bishops' conferences.[24] This reconciliation demonstrates that schisms may also be resolved without the involvement of civil courts. The current metropolitan, Mar Aprem, is very active in numerous ecumenical working groups and academic conferences. In 2016 the East Syrian Church of India includes 30,000 members, two additional bishops, 48 priests, 27 deacons, three deaconesses and three nuns.

The East Syrian and both West Syrian Churches have maintained their Christian-Oriental character; the faithful really are 'Hindus in their culture and Christians in their faith and their Syrian rite'.[25] Many ritual activities, such as, for instance, the offering of lights, floral garlands or fruit, may be observed both in churches and Hindu temples. An ancient peculiarity of the Syrian Churches is their charismatic character, which is expressed in the religious gatherings called *Prathana*. There a household or up to several hundred people come together to offer prayers, which are sung in time with rhythmic clapping. In between there are moments of meditative silence, which are interrupted by

Dr Dr Mar Aprem, Metropolitan of the Church of the East of India, during a worship service in the Church of Mar Narsai, Trichur, southern India.

isolated prayers offered aloud. The gathering concludes, like Sunday worship on special feast days, with a shared meal, the *agape* of the early Church.[26]

Among the Syrian Thomas Christians, marriages usually take place within the community. In the case of a mixed marriage, a regulation exists between the East Syrian Church and the Catholics that either an East Syrian or a Catholic pastor can legitimately bless the marriage. Since no such agreement exists with the West Syrians, a mixed marriage can lead to the excommunication of the West Syrian spouse. In order to spare the West Syrian spouse this painful experience, the Nestorian Church permits the East Syrian spouse-to-be to convert to one of the two West Syrian Churches on the day of the wedding, provided he or she returns to the ancestral Church the following day. The restriction to intra-Church marriages also reflects the awareness that, as the ancient copper plates attest, this community once belonged to a higher caste. In fact the Thomas Christians belong to the middle and upper class of Kerala, while Catholics and Protestants are found more in the lower social classes. Both Christianity and Islam offer their adherents from the lower castes, the so-called 'untouchables', the only way out of the degrading restrictions of the Indian caste system. However, such converts then lose civil allowances that poor Hindus receive and risk becoming the targets of violent Hindu fundamentalists.

The relationship of the Thomas Christians to a milder form of the caste concept can also be seen in the centuries-old priestly traditions within the same families and in the extraordinary respect the priests enjoy within the local community. The same respect is enjoyed by the wife of the priest, who generally must marry before ordination to the diaconate. A few priests live celibately, and

The Catholic St George Church is one of the innumerable churches of Kottayam, which is nicknamed 'Rome of the Mar Thomas Christians'.

from these the bishops are chosen.

The example of the Thomas Christians of South India shows that Christianity can only successfully expand and maintain itself in Asian lands with strong, deeply rooted native religions if it creates a cultural synthesis with its host country. Although the c.7.5 million Christians make up about 23 per cent of the overall population of Kerala, in the rest of India they constitute only 1.6 per cent. From the Christian standpoint it is regrettable that the attempts undertaken by the far-sighted Jesuits Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) in China and Roberto de Nobili (1577–1656) in India to adapt the external forms of Christianity to the cultural environment were disavowed by Rome. In this context, the American Protestant missionary Justin Perkins, who went to the Nestorians of Urmiah in 1834 and lived there for 36 years, proved to be more discerning: 'The oriental [Christian] house must be built of oriental material and adapted to the oriental environment, not the Western.'[27]

XI The Period of Trials and Divisions

The hereditary succession of high Church offices, introduced around 1450, ensured for the short term the survival of a rudimentary Church hierarchy, but it led to an intellectual and spiritual impoverishment and contained the seeds of a number of divisions and opportunistic alliances with Rome. The hereditary handing on of offices neither guaranteed that the most capable and motivated were appointed as bishops nor provided ambitious clerics with prospects for advancing their careers. The structuring of the Nestorian community along lines of family and tribe ensured further grounds for conflict, since the claim of a particular family to a high Church office, and the power and relative prosperity it offered, *eo ipso* excluded other families from it, leading to dissatisfaction and envy. Church politics became ever less oriented towards religious principles and more towards the interests of families and clans. This unfortunate situation persisted for half a millennium and ended only in 1976 when an Episcopal synod elected Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV according to the East Syrian canons.

The Church of St George in Famagusta, Cyprus, which once belonged to the Church of the East, was founded in 1359. In the interior room traces of the original mural painting have been preserved.

The first Chaldean Church – a union with Rome

Because the Church of the East never achieved the status of a state Church and constituted a minority even in its homeland Mesopotamia, it was dependent on the goodwill of rulers of other faiths. With the establishment of diplomatic contact between the Mongols and Western Europe, the prospect was opened of gaining the Catholic Church and the Catholic kingdoms as allies. The first efforts, made by the patriarchs Sabrisho V in 1247 and Yahballaha III in 1302/1304, were unsuccessful, but on 7 July 1445 the East Syrian metropolitan see of Cyprus, under the leadership of Mar Timothy of Tarsus, split from the mother Church and entered into union with Rome at the Council of Florence. Pope Eugene IV gave these Nestorians of Cyprus who converted to the Catholic Church the name Chaldeans, a term still in use today. This first of many unions had already foundered by 1450, because of the opposition of the faithful to Latinization measures.[1]

In the sixteenth century a political realignment took place in the Middle East, which further

complicated the situation of the Church. After the devastations of Tamerlane, Iran and Mesopotamia collapsed into small principalities, until the two powers reconstituted themselves and clashed as they expanded. In the West the Ottomans reconstructed their empire, which had been destroyed by Tamerlane, and this rebuilding culminated in the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. In the East there emerged in 1501 the Iranian dynasty of the Safavids (until 1732), who elevated Shi'ite Islam to the state religion, while the Ottoman Empire was majority Sunni. The expansion of the two powers led first in 1508 to the conquest of Mesopotamia by the Safavids, but it fell in 1534 to the Ottomans, who ruled it, except for a brief interruption from 1623 to 1638, until the end of World War I. The new borders divided the territory of the Nestorian Church into two regions: the western dioceses, with Mosul, Kurdistan and Hakkari to Lake Van, fell in the Ottoman Empire, and the eastern diocese in Iran. These political borders hindered the contact of the patriarchs with the faithful of the other empire, if they did not prevent this outright, which led again to divisions.

Upon the death of Patriarch Mar Shimun VII (in office 1538–1551) the system of hereditary succession proved to be disastrous. Since the bishops of Arbil, Urmiah and Salmas rejected as non-canonical the appointment of the late patriarch's nephew as the new patriarch Mar Shimun VIII (in office 1551–1558), in 1552 they elected the abbot of the monastery of Rabban Hormizd, John Sulaqa, as a rival patriarch, who took the name John VIII.[2] In order to prevent a foreseeable isolation, on 15 February 1553 John VIII Sulaqa accepted a Catholic creed before Pope Julius III, which acknowledged the primacy of the pope; he also suggested that Patriarch Mar Shimun VIII had died. Julius III then appointed him patriarch of the Chaldean Church on 28 April and conferred upon him the pallium, which marked Catholic and Uniate archbishops.[3] But the majority of the faithful and the bishops remained loyal to Mar Shimun VIII; only in Amida (Diyarbaqir) and Mardin did John VIII find recognition, whereupon he appointed two metropolitans and three bishops. The Ottoman administration, however, recognized Shimun VIII as the only legitimate head of his *millet*, so they had John Sulaqa arrested and murdered in prison in 1555. But Sulaqa's supporters were not intimidated and named Mar Abdisho IV (in office 1555–1570) as their new patriarch. Thus was the first schism sealed.

Patriarchs and anti-patriarchs

After the establishment of the Chaldean Church there followed until 1830 a convoluted succession of efforts at union and further splits, which had little to do with questions of faith but very much to do with power politics. Abdisho must have soon recognized that a Latinization of the liturgy was unfeasible, which is why the pope reluctantly agreed to the continued use of the Syrian rite. Shimun IX Dinkha (in office 1580–1600) returned to the system of hereditary succession and received papal recognition as the last patriarch of the so-called Sulaqa line. In order to avoid persecution by the Turkish authorities, he transferred the patriarchal see from Seert to Salmas, north of Urmiah. His successors Shimun X (in office 1600–1638) Shimun XI (in office 1638–1656) and Shimun XII (in office 1656–1662) strived in vain for papal recognition, as the sincerity of their creed was questioned. Patriarch Shimun XIII (in office 1662–1700) transferred his see from Iranian Khosrow Abad back to the Ottoman Empire, to Kotchannes in the mountains of Hakkari, and dissolved the union with Rome in 1672. This first Chaldean union with Rome formally lasted 119 years, though in fact it was recognized for only about forty-seven years. The patriarch of the 'mountain Nestorians', with his

The city of Hesno d-Kifo (Hasankeyf), on the Tigris River, was from c. 1257 to 1552 the seat of a Nestorian diocese. Then the East Syrian clergy chose the party of the anti-patriarch John Sulaqa.[69]

see in Kotchannes, where it remained until 1915, returned to the East Syrian tradition; today's Assyrian Church of the East is its distant legal successor.[4]

From 1504 to 1804 the patriarchs from the Abuna family resided with few interruptions in the monastery of Rabban Hormizd or in neighbouring Alqosh, about forty kilometres north of Mosul. While Mar Shimun VIII's successor Elias VI bar Giwargis (in office 1558–1591) held fast to Nestorianism, the next patriarch, Elias VII (in office 1591–1617), flirted with rapprochement with Rome. This was the time, however, when Rome began to distance itself from the Chaldean patriarchs. The patriarch sent his archimandrite Rabban Adam to Rome, and, after thorough examination, he returned to the East Syrian synod of 1616 accompanied by two Jesuits. Although the bishops agreed with all the texts that led to union, they raised energetic protests against the reckless actions of the Jesuits in south-western India. This indicates that, despite its isolation, the Church was well informed about events in India. The irate Jesuits rejected the professions, whereupon Pope Paul V had a new creed delivered to the patriarch, who was willing to convert, for his signature. When the messenger returned to Rabban Hormizd in 1617, the patriarch had just died. The newly elected catholicos, Mar Elias VIII (in office 1617–1660), signed the papal creed, but he added that the names of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius could not be removed from the liturgical texts and his Church would continue to call Mary mother of Christ, not mother of God. Despite further contacts, the union did not come to pass under Mar Elias VIII.

The distancing of Rome beginning in 1662, and the termination of the union of 1672 by the Sulaqa line left the Chaldeans without a leader, which resulted in the establishment of a third patriarchate. Encouraged by the local Capuchin missionaries,[5] in 1667/1668 Metropolitan Joseph of Amida left the Church of the East and professed Catholicism. After a trip to Rome Joseph received the papal pallium in 1681, thus establishing the second Chaldean patriarchate of Amida, which lasted until 1828. After Joseph I designated his successor Joseph II (in office 1696–1712) he stepped down, and died in 1707. In the late seventeenth century there were thus the two Nestorian patriarchates of Rabban Hormizd and Kotchannes, as well as the Chaldean patriarchate of Amida. At the time of Patriarch Joseph III (in office 1714–1757), Augustin Scandar collected East Syrian manuscripts in the region around Mosul and sent them to Rome to the Orientalist Joseph Simon Assemani (1687–1768), who included them in his monumental *Bibliotheca Orientalis* of 1728.[6] Joseph IV Lazarus Hindi (in

office 1759–1781) was recognized by Rome as patriarch, but his nephew and successor Joseph V Augustin Hindi (†1828) was acknowledged only as admin-istrator, since the likewise Catholic archbishop of Mosul from the line of Rabban Hormizd and Alqosh, John Hormez (†1838), disputed his right to the title. With the death of the administrator Augustin Hindi, who usurped the patriarchal title Joseph V, the Chaldean patriarchate of Amida ceased to exist in 1828.

Despite the failures of the efforts at union made by the Nestorian patriarchate of Rabban Hormizd, Mar Elias IX (in office 1660–1700) made further unsuccessful attempts between 1666 and 1670, as well as from 1692 to 1694. This means that between 1666 and 1672 all three of the 'Churches' that grew out of the ancient Church of the East were either formally united with Rome or were involved in efforts towards union. Although Mar Elias X (in office 1700–1722) had little contact with Rome, Mar Elias XI (in office 1722–1778), who in 1743 had to endure the destruction of his monastery of Rabban Hormizd by the Iranian despot Nadir Shah, again took up discussions of union in 1751 and 1772. Since the 'mountain Nestorian' patriarch of Kotchannes, Shimun XV Michael Muktes (in office 1740–1780), also dealt with Rome around 1771/1772, once again all three patriarchs had either a formal or a prospective relationship with Rome. These negotiations were not motivated by theological questions but primarily by the interests of the families affected. The same was true in the case of the efforts towards union made by the next and last patriarch of the Rabban Hormizd line, Mar Elias XII Ishoyahb (in office 1778–1804). Because his cousin John Hermez also sought patriarchal title, Mar Elias professed Catholicism in 1778, in order to gain papal recognition. At that time the signing of a Roman Catholic creed had nothing to do with theological questions but, rather, served only the politics of power and security in battles for succession. The Vatican was aware of this and more than once refused recognition for dubious statements of faith, in order not to become the instrument of any one faction. In any case, John Hermez had to content himself with papal recognition as archbishop of Mosul and administrator, of which he was stripped in 1818, and wait until 1830 for the title of patriarch.

Bishop's grave in the Meskinta Cathedral, today Chaldean, in Mosul, northern Iraq. Between 1364 until about the middle of the fifteenth century the church, founded in 1199 or 1212, served as the patriarchal cathedral of the three patriarchs of the Church of the East who lived in Mosul.[70]

Despite its caution, the Vatican erred in recognizing Mar Elias XII Ishoyahb as patriarch in 1778, for only a few months later, in May 1779, Elias XII denounced the union with Rome, which had not yet been formally concluded, and returned to Nestorianism, presumably because he had been unable to unite the two other Church groups of Kotchannes and Amida under his leadership and with his line.[7] Now four prelates – the two Uniate administrators of Amida and Mosul and the two non-Uniate, Nestorian patriarchs of Kotchannes and Alqosh – fought for predominance over the remaining dioceses and members of the one-time Church

of the East. Only death allowed the muddled situation to be somewhat clarified. Mar Elias XII died in 1804, bringing an end to the Nestorian patriarchate of Rabban Hormizd and Alqosh, and Joseph V Hindi of Amida died in 1828.[8] After thorough examination, the pope appointed John VIII Hormez as patriarch for the Chaldean Catholic Church, with his see at Baghdad.[9] The situation also became clearer on the Nestorian side. After a nephew of John VIII Hormez tried unsuccessfully in 1831 to be elected as an anti-patriarch under the name Elias XIV, the patriarchate of Kotchannes under Mar Shimun XVII Abraham (in office 1820–1861) remained more or less unchallenged. But the Nestorians soon became the prey of Roman Catholic, Chaldean, Anglican, Protestant and Russian missionaries, all of whom enjoyed more or less strong support from the Western great powers. To paraphrase Metropolitan Mar Aprem, the missionaries attacked the Syrian congregations like hungry wolves 'in order to steal their sheep'.[10] Neither the missionaries nor the Nestorians noticed that they were merely tiny, always dispensable figures on the chessboard of inter-national politics. The Church of the East owed its survival during this time to its deep roots among the faithful.

The surprising result of these complex unions and divisions consists in the fact that the Chaldean Catholic Church, led in 2005 by Patriarch Mar Emmanuel III Delly (in office since 2003), is the successor to the ancient catholicate of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, while the Assyrian Church of the East, led by Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV (in office since 1976), is descended from the formerly Catholic patriarchate of John Sulaqa. Put differently, the hierarchal line of the ancient Nestorian Church of the East has become Catholic, while the hierarchical line that was once united with Rome has returned to the East Syrian creed.[11]

The tiny East Syrian Rabban Hormizd Chapel in Dasgir is located in the mountains west of Urmiah, Iran. In the Kurdish mountains the Nestorians intentionally built their chapels either very small or with tiny entrances in order to prevent the Kurds from misusing the churches as stalls for cattle.

The political situation in the Ottoman Empire and the Chaldean Catholic Church until the twentieth century

In the nineteenth century the European great powers, France, Great Britain and Russia, compelled the Turkish sultans on the one hand to offer better protection to the Christians within the Ottoman Empire and, on the other, to allow greater latitude to missionaries. The same occurred in Iran, as the country, beginning in 1872, slowly diminished in status to become an English–Russian protectorate. Naturally the field of operation for the European and American missionaries was limited to other Christian groups, such as the Armenians and Nestorians; to work among the Muslims was strictly forbidden, and among the Jews they had no prospects for success.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century in the Ottoman Empire, Sultan Abdul Hamid II (ruled 1876–1909) instituted a policy of pan-Islamism, in order to mobilize the Arab provinces and Islamic dignitaries against the expanding colonial powers. The Ottoman government chose the Armenians as scapegoats for the empire's internal collapse – between 1894 and 1896 about 300,000 innocent Armenians were massacred. After the 1908 seizure of power by the Young Turks, who played the ultranationalist card, a holocaust took place during World War I among the Armenians and Nestorian Assyrians, with approximately 1.6 to 1.8 million victims. Both peoples lost 50 to 60 per cent of their members.

When John VIII Hormez was finally named Chaldean patriarch, he had to agree not to designate a relative as his successor. He was the last catholicos from the Abuna family, which supplied a total of 14 patriarchs. Further conditions included that the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church be accepted, leading to the introduction of personal confession, extreme unction and separate confirmation. Although men who were already married were permitted into the office of priest, remarriage following the death of a wife was forbidden. After John VIII's death Rome appointed Nicholas I (†1855) as Chaldean patriarch, but he resigned in 1847 on account of disagreements with the Vatican. He was followed by Joseph VI Audo (in office 1848–1878), whose patriarchate was marked by endless struggles about the oriental character of his Church and its sovereignty. The conflict was sparked by the papal claim to be the sole authority in naming the Chaldean bishops. The conflict first flared up when Joseph Audo sent the patriarchal vicar Thomas Rokos to India in 1860 but had to recall him later under papal pressure. At the First Vatican Council in 1870 he fought against the dogma of papal infallibility and in 1874, with Bishop Elias Mellus, sent a high dignitary to India for the second time. When, shortly before his death, the authoritarian Pope Pius IX threatened him with excommunication, he gave in and summoned Elias Mellus to return.

Procession of Chaldean Christians from Alqosh, northern Iraq, 1998.

Joseph Audo also undertook important efforts to educate priests and the faithful, opening a publishing house in 1860 and a seminary in 1866.

Patriarch Emmanuel II Thomas (in office 1900–1947) launched major and also successful efforts to win Nestorians for his Church. In this regard the conversion of Bishop Abraham of Hakkari in 1902 was especially outstanding because he was a cousin of and the designated successor to the Nestorian patriarch Shimun XVIII (in office 1861–1903). Along with Abraham, another bishop and several tribes converted to the Chaldean Church.[12] However, all changes of denomination made at that time were not theologically motivated; rather, Christians and clergy hoped that the European great powers, above all France, would intervene with Istanbul to keep the plundering and murderous Kurds in check.

Catholic, Russian Orthodox and Protestant missionaries

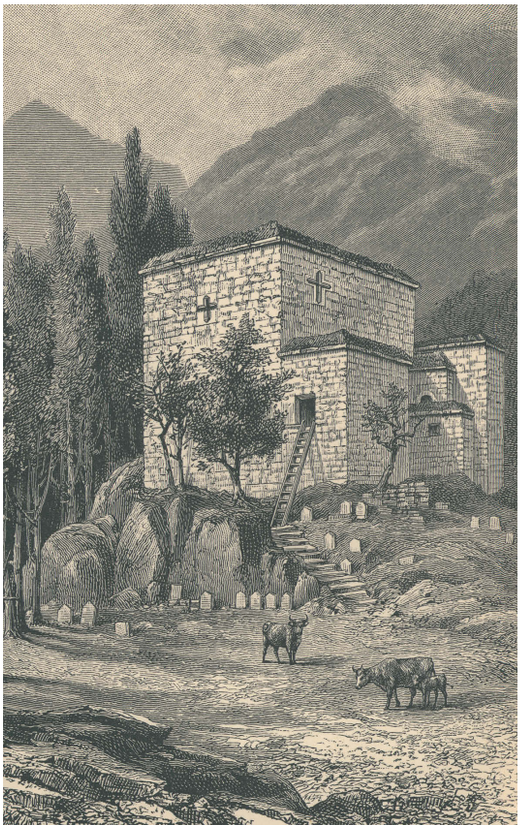
Since the Nestorians' retreat from the cities of Mesopotamia in the fifteenth century, they had been divided into two social groups. One consisted of farmers living in the broad valleys near the mountains of Kurdistan, whether it be north of Mosul, south of the Turkish Lake Van or west of the Iranian Lake Urmiah. This small minority was oppressed again and again by the Muslims, especially the Kurds, in the form of special taxation, extortion, plunder and the abduction of young women. Their churches were also often the targets of destructive attacks. It was especially painful for the rural East Syrians that in the early nineteenth century they lost their two remaining great libraries. First, Catholic missionaries incited recent converts to Catholicism to throw the library of Mosul, made up of many thousands of manuscripts, into the River Tigris, after which the Kurdish leader Mohammed Pasha attacked the former patriarchal see of Rabban Hormizd in 1832. He not only had the churches desecrated and monks massacred; he had also as many books as possible burnt.[13]

The second social group was made up of the so-called mountain Nestorians, who lived from their herds of sheep and goats, as well as the meagre harvest from small mountain fields. Their character and lifestyle had been fully adapted to the harsh environment of the rugged mountains of Kurdistan – they were a freedom-loving and battle-ready people, who instilled fear even in the Kurdish arch-enemy. In 1839 the American Presbyterian missionary Grant described the mountain Nestorians as 'the most independent people I ever saw, in every respect'. When Kurds from central Kurdistan, who had just plundered Rabban Hormizd, drew near, the Nestorians were said to have beheaded a half-dozen Kurds and displayed their heads on spikes on the bridge leading into their territory as a deterrent.[14] Regarding those mountain Nestorians who lived in the heart of the Kurdish mountains, the British traveller Isabella Bishop, who visited them in 1890, reported: 'They are practically unconquered by the Turks and unmolested by the Kurds; and maintain a fierce semi-independence under their *maleks* [lit. kings] and chiefs. They are wild and lawless mountaineers; brave, hardy and warlike, preserving their freedom by the sword; fierce, quarrelsome among themselves; and have little in common with the subject Syrians of the plains except their tenacious clinging to their ancient Church.'[15] In this tribal society the patriarch brought together religious and worldly power. These were acknowledged by the tribal leaders because, to implement his decisions, he could apply the feared punishment of excommunication, even in civil matters, and this was equivalent to expulsion from society. Nevertheless, he could not prevent the mountain Nestorians, who fought bitterly with each other, from entering into disastrous alliances with Kurdish tribal leaders.[16]

Although Catholic missionaries had already long been active among the rural Nestorians, the West 'discovered' this small Christian community only beginning in 1820. First, the British archaeologist and employee of the East India Company Claude Rich reported in 1820 of these Syrian Christians, who still used the language of Jesus, Aramaic or East Syriac. This last created a minor sensation: the Nestorians represented a living fossil, which it was necessary to study, to preserve and finally to convert. The first priest to come to the mountain Nestorians from the Anglo-Saxon regions was the British pastor Joseph Wolff in 1825. He took back to England a manuscript of the Peshitta, which he had published there and distributed in the region around Urmiah in 1827.[17]

But contacts between the mountain Nestorians and Western missionaries developed into a double-edged sword for both sides. A new field of activity was opened for the missionaries, and the Nestorians hoped for political aid – the dream of the patriarchs at that time revolved around a future European protectorate that would guarantee the security of their people. On the other side, these intentions were a thorn in the side of the Kurds, which is why in 1829 they murdered the German C. Schultz on his return from a visit to the patriarch in Kotchannes.[18] Worse yet, the numerically far superior Kurds avenged themselves on the mountain Nestorians on account of the purported internationalization of the 'Christian question' with increasing massacres, for which they received the support of the pan-Islamist and ultranationalist Turkish factions. Since a few East Syrian bishops expected political gain from a conversion to the Chaldean or Russian Orthodox Church, the Church of the East was further weakened by the missionary efforts of their potential allies. But in 1830 it looked at first as though the intervention of European powers could help the Nestorians, for the Ottoman government was compelled to stop the Kurdish attacks.

Two years earlier Russian troops had advanced to Urmiah, which had inspired individual groups of Nestorians to choose the Russian Orthodox Church for the short term. In 1830, with the Presbyterians E. Smith and H. G. O. Dwight of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, Americans for the first time appeared on the chessboard of the mission to the Nestorians.[19] The promising report of Smith and Dwight led in 1833 to the sending of Justin Perkins, who arrived in Urmiah in 1834. In contrast to their American successors and the Catholic missionaries, Perkins and his superiors were at first sincerely well disposed towards the Nestorians. His orders read: 'A primary object which you will have in view, will be to convince the people, that you come among them with no design to take away their religious privileges, not to subject them to any foreign ecclesiastical power. The only acknowledged head of the Church is Jesus Christ, and your only acknowledged standard in ecclesiastical matters is the New Testament. The Syrian Church acknowledges the same head and also the same standard, though it may be, with some additions. You will have, therefore, a broad common ground. But your main objective will be, to enable the Nestorian Church, through the grace of God, to exert a commanding influence in the spiritual regeneration of Asia.'[20] The Presbyterian missionaries were comfortable with the absence from the Nestorian churches of statues and images, with the cross without the crucified figure, and with the aversion to the pope, which is why they called the Nestorians the 'Protestants of Asia'.[21] Conversely, the Nestorians, who had never heard of the Reformation, indulged in the idea that the Protestants were the 'Nestorians of the West'.[22] This spiritual brotherhood developed not least because the early Presbyterian and Anglican priests who lived among the Nestorians mostly dispensed with attempts at conversion. They provided assistance in matters of education and



The Mar Shalita basilica of Kotchannes in the Hakkari Mountains of Kurdistan, south-eastern Turkey. From 1662 to 1915 it served as the patriarchal see of the patriarchs of the so-called 'Sulaqa line' of the Church of the East. The only entrance was almost four metres above the ground and accessible only via a ladder that could be removed at any time. In troubled times, the fortified church served Christians as a place of refuge. Illustration by Isabella Bishop, 1890.

health, in contrast to the Catholics, who applied great pressure and did not hesitate to attempt to bribe patriarchs and bishops with money.[23] In a more amusing case, a Nestorian bishop and a Catholic bishop could not agree on theological questions, so they brought their argument before the chief mullah of Urmiah, who declared the Nestorian the victor – a process that recalls the old debates before the Mongol princes.[24]

In 1835 the Presbyterian physician and missionary Asahel Grant reached Urmiah. Together with his wife, he not only opened a school and a medical practice greatly valued by both Christians and Muslims, he also sought to prove that the Nestorians were the descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel.[25] Four years later he was instructed by the Board of Missions to take up work among the mountain Nestorians of Hakkari. However, Grant was attacked in Mardin by angry Muslims and had to seek refuge in the nearby West Syrian monastery of Deir az-Zafaran. After a meeting with Patriarch Mar Shimun XVII Abraham, Grant returned to Urmiah, where he soon received support through the arrival of the missionaries A. Hallady and W. Stocking in 1837, W. Jones in 1839, A. Wright in 1840 and finally E. Breath, who brought along a printing press.

That such missionary attempts could also be politically explosive was tragically revealed in 1843. Grant's activity irritated the Kurdish leader Badr Khan, who dreamt of an independent Kurdistan. Nevertheless, Grant won the friendship of Nurallah, a chieftain subordinate to Badr Khan, whom he cured of an illness. For both the patriarch, who hoped the American Grant would provide protection from the Kurdish threat, and Badr Khan, who viewed Grant's efforts with suspicion, his missionary work had an eminently political dimension, which Grant himself did not want to admit. When, in the early summer of 1843, he set out to see the Kurdish leaders Badr Khan and Nurallah hundreds of Nestorians streamed to him and asked him to speak to his friend Nurallah on their behalf. He not only refused this request on the grounds of neutrality, he also observed with indifference the military preparations being made in the camp of the two Kurdish leaders for an invasion of the Nestorian regions. Instead of trying to mediate between Badr Khan and Patriarch Mar Shimun XVII with the help of his friend Nurallah, he concerned himself only with the assurance that the attacking Kurds would spare a schoolhouse he had built.

When Grant had only just left the Kurdish camp the Kurds attacked the Nestorians in the plains first, in June, and then the mountain Nestorians, in July. 'The massacre was the ugliest which the Nestorians of Kurdistan had experienced since the ravages of Timur Lang.'[26]

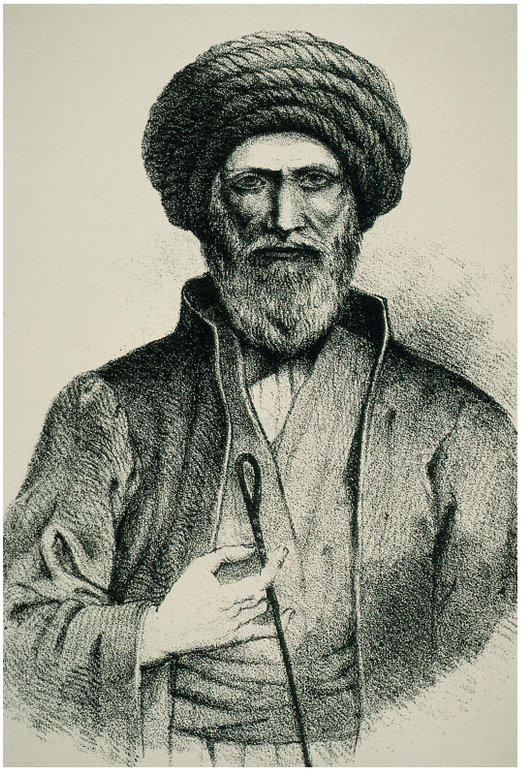
The Kurds murdered thousands of women and men, slicing off the ears of the dead and sending them to Badr Khan. Since young women were either sold as slaves or given as gifts to Muslim chieftains, many opted for suicide and threw themselves from bridges into the chasms below. At the same time, all the herds were stolen, churches razed, libraries destroyed and entire villages consumed by flames. In order to prevent the return of the fleeing Nestorians to their homeland, the Kurds also destroyed the irrigation canals and felled the fruit trees.[27] The patriarch had to seek asylum in the British consulate in Mosul, and he thus escaped the fate of the West Syrian maphrian (archbishop), who was murdered by Badr Khan in Midyat. Three years later the Kurds attacked the mountain Nestorians of the Tyari tribe and systematically killed the priests, deacons and family leaders; not a single church remained standing. In total the Kurds massacred about 15,000 to 20,000 Nestorians. As far as Grant's schoolhouse is concerned, they did in fact leave it undamaged, but they converted it into a fort. Grant himself died of typhus in Mosul in 1844, when he was caring for Nestorian refugees.[28] After the third massacre of Christians, in 1846, the British government intervened with Istanbul. Kurdistan was placed under a Turkish pasha, and Badr Khan was sent into exile. Nevertheless, the Turkish authorities forbade the Nestorians from rebuilding their churches, in order to extort large bribes from them.[29] Today we know that the Turkish government, which at that time held only loose authority over northern Mesopotamia, had incited the Kurds to massacre the Christians, so they could, in a second step, find a pretext to intervene militarily and destroy the Kurdish emirates.[30]

As a consequence of the lack of humanitarian help from Grant, relations deteriorated between the Nestorian clergy and the American Presbyterians, who for their part began harshly attacking the liturgical customs of the East Syrians.

Priest of the Church of the East in northern Iraq, circa mid-1920s.

Not only did the new arrivals publish and distribute anti-Nestorian tracts; the originally open-minded Perkins also adopted a fanatical tone when he attacked the practice of fasting: 'I do not know what more artful contrivance Satan could have invented, to substitute in the place of the pure religion of the gospel, than he has furnished with the fasts of these oriental churches.'[31] The patriarch had the American school in Urmiah closed, whereupon most Presbyterians left the city and Mosul. Around 1870 they returned and began an aggressive campaign for conversion, which led to the establishment of an Assyrian Protestant Church.[32] The missionary activities of other Protestant Churches later caused just as many divisions on the Nestorian side. Not for nothing had Mar Shimun XVII Abraham declared on his deathbed: 'If you must change your religion, in order to guarantee the survival of our nation, convert to the Chaldeans, not the Protestants.'[33]

The British did not stand idly by. In the years between 1835 and 1837 the British colonel Chesney led the Euphrates expedition, and upon his return told of ancient Christians in Kurdistan. This inspired the Royal Geographical Society and the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge to send the surgeon and geologist W. Ainsworth to the patriarch in 1838. Together with his travel companion, the Chaldean Isa (Jesus) Rassam, who after the end of the expedition was appointed vice-consul in Mosul, Ainsworth met Patriarch Shimun XVII in 1840. It was on the occasion of this meeting that the patriarch became angry about the crucifix Isa Rassam had brought along. For Christ had suffered but once and died but once, and now he is resurrected and enthroned in glory. No true Christian could portray the suffering Christ, since the symbol of Christianity was the 'empty' cross of the resurrection. The patriarch threw the crucifix away.[34]



The patriarch of the Church of the East, Mar Shimun XVII (in office 1820–1861). Drawing by George Badger, c. 1843.

From this reconnaissance there resulted at the end of 1842 the trip of George Percy Badger, who enjoyed the support of the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London. At his meeting with the patriarch in 1843 Badger succeeding in persuading him that the Anglican Church harboured no intentions of conversion but wanted to help the Nestorians in the areas of education and health.[35] The Anglican mission-aries held to this strategy. The fifth Anglican missionary campaign, concluded in 1885, formulated its goal thus: 'The work of the mission is in the first place to train up a body of literate clergy; secondly to instruct the youth in both religious and secular knowledge; and thirdly to print the very early liturgies of the Assyrians. The mission in no way seeks to Anglicanise the Assyrians nor to condone their heresy or to minimize its importance.'[36] Patriarch Mar Shimun XVIII Ruben (1861–1903) was nevertheless disappointed by the British, as Isabella Bishop reported: 'The patriarch and his people hoped for a British protectorate as one result of *the Archbishop of Canterbury's Mission,* and they are bitterly disappointed that their condition is growing worse.'[37] However, the British ambassador in Istanbul, Henry Layard (†1894), and the prime minister, Lord Salisbury (†1903), had already warned him that working closely with the Church of England could provoke further persecutions by the Turks and Kurds.[38]

It was in the second half of the nineteenth century that Anglican and American missionaries as well as the archaeologist Austen A. Layard described to the broad public the members of the Church of the East as *Assyrians.*[39] The missionary W. A. Wigram, active in the early twentieth century, titled his book *The Assyrians and their Neighbours* and defined the Nestorians as the true descendants of the Assyrians, whose

The Assyrian Reformed Mar Thoma Church in Mushava, Urmiah, Iran, late nineteenth century.

empire fell in 612 BCE. But, as Isabella Bishop, Grant and other missionaries had noted, in the nineteenth century the Nestorians called themselves not 'Assyrians' but rather 'Syrians', 'Nazarenes' or simply 'Christians'. None the less, there are numerous proofs that the missionaries and Layard were not the first to call the local people of the Adiabene – the heartland of ancient Assyria and later one of the cradles of the Church of the East – Assyrians even after the fall of the Assyrian Empire. However, the Church first took on its present official name, the Holy Apostolic and Catholic Assyrian Church of the East, only under Patriarch Mar Shimun XXI in 1975.[40]

The hesitant attitude of the British government, which was not interested in the Christian minorities of Kurdistan but only in limiting the Russian sphere of influence, pushed the Nestorians directly into the arms of the tsar. On 26 April 1868 Patriarch Mar Shimun XVIII wrote to the Russian tsar: 'For some time past you have known and heard of the state of the Nestorians, a nation of poor people, who live in the mountains of Kurdistan. The Kurds have forcibly taken possession of several of our churches and convents; they constantly abduct our virgins, brides and women, forcing them to turn Moslems. For twenty years and more the Turks have taken possession of the country, but they are worse than the Kurds. We beseech your Mightiness, for the sake of Jesus, His Baptism, and Cross, either free us from such a state or procure us a remedy.'[41] This letter had no effect

The Mar Giwargis Church, which belongs to the Church of the East and is located near Ardishai Urmiah, Iran, was desecrated by vandals in 2001.

at first, but, when in 1876 the tsar declared himself prepared to work with Great Britain to help the Nestorians, Britain refused. England had concluded a defensive military alliance with the Ottoman Empire against Russia and thus sacrificed the mountain Nestorians on the altar of the politics of the great powers.

After the 1883/1884 negotiations about union with the Russian Orthodox Church broke down, Bishop Yuhannan of Urmiah signed a corresponding union treaty in St Petersburg in 1898. He was followed by over 20,000 faithful, who renounced the 'Nestorian heresy', whereupon a second Assyrian Russian Orthodox bishop was appointed and the old Church of the Virgin Mary in Urmiah was remodelled in the typical Russian style. With the purely politically motivated 'conversion', the people hoped to be spared the fate suffered by the Armenians living in the Ottoman Empire during the first genocide carried out by the Turks and Kurds in 1894–1896. Paradoxically, the situation of the Armenians had then taken a turn for the worse, when the leading Western powers at the peace conference in Berlin compelled the Ottoman Turks to reform the administration of the eastern Anatolian provinces, where millions of Christians lived. After this Sultan Abdul Hamid II, as a first step, purposefully settled anti-Christian Kurds in the regions with Christian majorities.[42] As a second step he armed them militarily in the name of pan-Islamism, and built them into an irregular parallel army, in order to exterminate the Armenians. The

same fate threatened the Nestorians. However, the Assyrians of Urmiah bound their fate to that of Russia or to Russia's military fortunes. At the same time, the Turkish government met the Assyrians living in the Ottoman Empire with increased distrust; they fell under suspicion of being a fifth column of the tsar.

The union with Russia soon suffered its first setback when the Russian Orthodox aid waned as a result of the Russian defeat in the Russo–Japanese War of 1904–1905 and the consequent internal unrest. At the same time more Protestant groups entered the region of Urmiah, such as the missionaries of the United Lutheran Church of America, the Methodists, the Northern and Southern Baptists, the American Dunkards, the English Congregationalists, the English Plymouth Brethren, the German Oriental Mission, the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of the Nestorian Church and the Swedish-American Augustana Synod.[43] Added to these were the established missionaries of the Catholic Lazarists, the Carmelites, the Chaldeans, the Anglicans and the Russian Orthodox. Presumably nowhere else in the world did so many rival Christian groups romp about in such a small area as in Urmiah. This undignified 'hunt for souls' ruined the morale of the Christians of Urmiah, who now treated 'religion like sport and trade'.[44]

The Anglo-Russian convention of 1907, which regulated the zones of influence of the two great powers, gave the Nestorians a brief pause for breath. Taking advantage of the conditions in Iran, which resembled civil war, tsarist troops marched into Azerbaijan in 1909 and occupied Tabriz, Salmas and Urmiah. Now the Russian consul, based in Urmiah, governed the territory of the Nestorians and assured them of a security they had not enjoyed for a long time. The Russian Orthodox Assyrians hoped that Russia would finally annex Urmiah. In light of the positive developments in Urmiah and the increasingly anti-Christian policies of the Young Turks,

Christian villages in the region of Urmiah, Iran.

Patriarch Mar Shimun XIX Benjamin (in office 1903–1918) decided in the spring of 1914 to convert with his people living in the Ottoman Empire to the Russian Orthodox Church.[45] Because of World War I this step handed his people over to the blind hatred of the Turks and Kurds, instead of placing them under the protection of the ostensibly powerful tsar.

The genocide of 1915 – 1918

When, after much Turkish provocation, Russia declared war on the Ottoman Empire on 1 November 1914, all the Christians in the Iranian region of Azerbaijan, who had enjoyed the protection of the Russian Cossacks since 1909, believed they were finally free of the Islamic yoke

From 1915 to 1918, General Agha Petros (1880–1932), with a small Assyrian voluntary army, achieved several successes against the Turks, but failed in his attempt to establish an autonomous Assyrian region in Kurdistan. In 1923 the British-Iraqi authorities forced him into exile in France, where he died under unsolved circumstances in 1932. (Photo c. 1914.)

Nestorian gravestone in the cemetery of Khosrow Abad near Delemon, Azerbaijan, Iran.

and placed themselves on the side of the tsar. At the same time, the strongman in Istanbul, Enver Pasha (1881–1922), announced the jihad, the holy war against the Christians, on 4 November, which of course roused the Kurds to carry out new massacres. Since Azerbaijan, compared to the Caucasus, was for Russia only a secondary theatre of war, it evacuated Urmiah on 2 January and Salmas on 4 January 1915. Some 15,000 Assyro-Chaldeans[46] fled in the footsteps of the retreating Russian army to the north, where the majority died from the winter cold and hunger. But no sooner had the Cossacks left Urmiah than Turks and Kurds under the leadership of the Kurdish ruler Agha Simko (†1930) stormed the city and the surrounding villages, where they carried out a systematic hunt for Christians: men were murdered and women raped. The approximately 20,000 Assyro-Chaldeans who found refuge in the French and American missionary buildings had better luck. There began simultaneously in eastern Anatolia the total ethnic cleansing of Christians from Turkey, ordered by the Turkish interior minister Talat Pasha (1874–1921) on 24 April 1915, to which Armenians as well as Syrian Orthodox, Chaldeans and Nestorians fell victim; for about two million Christians this was the equivalent of a descent into hell.[47] The massacres began in the cities of Amida (Diyarbakir), Mardin and Midyat, and then proceeded into Nisibis, Jazireh and Seert, where the famous Church historian and archbishop Addai Scher was murdered and the library, filled with ancient manuscripts, went up in

The patriarch of the Church of the East, Mar Shimun XIX (in office 1903–1918), along with all the Assyrians living in Hakkari, had to flee from Turkish–Kurdish troops to Urmiah in 1915.

Patriarch Mar Shimun XIX was murdered by the Kurdish leader Agha Simko on 16 March 1918 near this Chapel of Mar Jacub near Salmas, dating from the thirteenth century.

flames. In the space of a few weeks the Turkish–Kurdish gangs massacred tens of thousands of Christians – those who were able to flee to the mountains were murdered by bands of Kurds.

Since it was only a matter of a few weeks before the Turkish–Kurdish marauders would reach Hakkari, to which the Nestorians had retreated, Patriarch Mar Shimun XIX Benjamin accepted the alliance offer of Russia, which was carrying out a counter-offensive in the regions of Urmiah and Van. On 10 May 1915 he officially declared war on Turkey in the name of his nation.[48] But the fortunes of war soon turned, as the Turks drove the Russians out of Van and waged fierce battles against the mountain Nestorians. In order to escape the imminent encirclement, the Assyrian leadership decided in the summer of 1915 to flee and unite with the Assyrians of Urmiah. About 60,000 men, women and children left their homeland, which they would never see again. Arriving in Urmiah, the united Assyrians supplied the Russians with some 20,000 battle-tested soldiers under the leadership of General David, a brother of the patriarch, and General Agha Petros (1880–1932). In light of a few successes and the slow British advance on Baghdad, there arose the dream that united Anglo-Russian forces would liberate the Assyrian homeland, which is why the Assyrians, under Russian pressure, agreed to a tactical alliance with the Kurdish leader Agha Simko.

But in March of 1917 revolution broke out in Russia, followed by the Bolshevik coup in October. The Russian Caucasus army collapsed into

chaos and its troops left Urmiah in October/November 1917. Since the British were still 500 kilometres from Urmiah, the Assyrian fighters now stood alone against the Turkish army, who were burning to reconquer the region to avenge the attacks made on the local Muslims by the Russians. Worse yet, the Kurd Agha Simko decided in early 1918 to switch sides and lure the patriarch into a trap, so he invited him to a discussion at Salmas. Although Mar Shimun's staff warned him against the meeting, he gave in to pressure from the British captain Gracey and went on 16 March to Agha Simko, who had him and his companions treacherously murdered.[49] As successor to the murdered patriarch his younger brother was appointed, Mar Shimun XX Paulos (in office 1918–1920), who suffered from tuberculosis and thus could not assume his leadership duties. The Assyrian acts of vengeance against the Muslims were followed by Kurdish massacres of Christians.[50]

Although politically leaderless, the Assyrians, under the brilliant leadership of Agha Petros, mounted a fierce opposition against the Turkish army, as Great Britain held out the prospect of an autonomous territory at the war's end.[51] But when another encirclement threatened the Assyrians in late June 1918, they decided to break through to the British at Hamadan. Almost 100,000 people left for the south in July 1918, and of these about half reached Hamadan in western Iran, completely exhausted; the others were victims of Turkish or Persian attacks or of epidemics. The approximately 15,000 Christians who remained in Urmiah were murdered by Turkish–Kurdish gangs. Although the Ottoman Empire had capitulated in the interim, the British disarmed the fleeing Assyrians and led them on a forced march in the direction of Baghdad, where they were interned in refugee camps at Bakuba. With this the Assyrians lost their final opportunity to return to their now depopulated homeland of Hakkari.

The genocide carried out against the Christians living in the Ottoman Empire anticipated the Holocaust of the Jews in Hitler's Germany. The massacres by Turks and Kurds in 1894–1896 and 1915–1918 caused c. 1.5 to 1.7 million Armenian deaths and 90,000 to 100,000 Assyrian deaths – the Armenians lost about 55 per cent of their people, the Assyrians 60 per cent to 65 per cent. Added to this were some 100,000 murdered Syrian Orthodox and just as many Chaldeans.[52] While until 1915 about 150,000 Syrian Orthodox (Jacobites) lived in Tur Abdin in south-eastern Anatolia, which was ceded to Turkey in 1923, today there are fewer than 3000. Among the Assyrians the result was even more serious, as, with the violent deaths of a patriarch, a metropolitan, many bishops and nearly all priests, some 80 per cent to 85 per cent of the spiritual élite died – a wound that had still not healed fifty years later. Apart from isolated cases, in which Turkish and Kurdish individuals risked their lives to hide persecuted Christians in their homes, this genocide was a project planned by the Turkish government, from which the Muslim natives profited as the property of the murdered Christians was distributed among them free of charge. Although the Turkish Republic is the legitimate successor to the Ottoman Empire, it refuses to this day to acknowledge as such the genocide carried out against the Christians.

While the uprooted Church of the East stood at the edge of an abyss, there emerged among the refugees for the first time a feeling of national identity, which allowed the interests of individual tribes to move somewhat to the background. Both traditional Nestorians and the reformed groups understood themselves as part of the Assyrian nation.[53]

Hopes betrayed

The situation of the Assyrian refugees was worsened by the death in 1920 of their gravely ill patriarch Mar Shimun XX and the subsequent internal debates. Without consulting Metropolitan Timothy, who was travelling from India, the late patriarch's sister, Lady Surma d'Mar Shimun, had her twelve-year-old nephew consecrated as Patriarch Mar Shimun XXI Eshai (in office 1920–1975).[54] Since many Assyrians would not acknowledge an under-age boy as spiritual and secular ruler, they split into two bitterly opposed camps: that of the patriarchal family, led by his aunt Surma and his father General David, and the opposition party, led by the war hero Agha Petros. All mediation attempts undertaken by Mar Timothy foundered on Surma's intransigence.[55] Despite the inner strife, the Assyrians harboured the dream of an independent state, or at least an autonomous region, as they had been promised by the British in 1917.

At the end of the war Great Britain faced the impossible task, which it had brought upon itself, of fulfilling its many and often contra-dictory promises. First, the British had promised the Armenians, as well as the Kurds and Assyrians, their own states, although their respective territories included significant overlap. Second, Lawrence of Arabia had extended to the Hashemite leaders of the Arab revolt the prospect of an independent Arab state, which would encompass all Arab regions of the Ottoman Empire.[56] This promise contradicted not only the obligations to the Kurds and Assyrians living in Mesopotamia but also the famous Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917, in which British Foreign Secretary Balfour promised to Baron de Rothschild to create a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine. But as early as May 1916 the secret agreement between the authorized representatives Sir Mark Sykes and Georges Picot, which divided the Middle East into zones of interest, tossed out all later promises even before the fact – none was fulfilled. Out of the moribund Ottoman Empire, Syria, Lebanon, south-eastern Anatolia and Mosul were to go to France, and Baghdad, southern Mesopotamia and the ports of Haifa and Akko to Great Britain. Between them was to be an Arab satellite state, divided into French and British zones of influence. Finally, Jerusalem was to be placed under international control.[57]

While the Arabs at least received the kingdoms of Mecca and Medina, Jordan and Iraq – although the last two were British protectorates – the Armenians, Kurds and Assyrians went away empty-handed; they were sacrificed for the sake of British interests on the altar of the oil discovered in southern Kurdistan.[58] Then, in October 1920, the attempt undertaken by Agha Petros to establish by military means and with British support the seed of an autonomous Assyrian region in Kurdistan failed miserably, due to the lack of discipline among his troops.[59] In the following months thousands of Assyrians began to trickle back into their villages in Hakkari and Urmiah. Since in the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923 Turkey had successfully fended off any Assyro-Chaldean autonomy, in 1924 the Assyrians and Chaldeans appealed to the League of Nations, which was working on drawing a definitive border between Turkey and Iraq. When a commission decided to visit Hakkari, which was again inhabited by Nestorians, Kamal Atatürk sent troops to create a fait accompli. They carried out a bloodbath and destroyed the only recently rebuilt Christian villages; the survivors fled back to Iraq.[60] But it was not the Ottoman sultanate that performed this renewed ethnic cleansing; rather, it was the Turkish Republic. In December 1925 the League of Nations finally granted oil-rich northern Mesopotamia to the British protectorate of Iraq and the Hakkari mountains to Turkey; the Kurds and Assyrians were left with nothing. Immediately thereafter Turkey confirmed

that return of the Assyrian refugees was forbidden and returning Assyrians would be harshly punished.[61]

Although the political situation of the Assyrians in the British protectorate remained unsatisfying, at least their security was ensured. But this, too, was only for a limited time, as the Anglo-Iraqi negotiations over a British withdrawal began in 1927 and led in 1932 to Iraqi independence. It was foreseeable that the Assyrians would lose the protection of the British. The situation grew worse after the patriarch travelled to Geneva in 1932 to the League of Nations, and early in 1933 this body definitively rejected the Assyrian claim to be acknowledged as a homogeneous group and be granted an autonomous region. Upon his return to Iraq, Patriarch Mar Shimun was placed under house arrest and given an ultimatum to surrender all secular authority. Because he fought this deprivation of power, he was deported from Iraq to Cyprus at the end of August 1933; he also lost his Iraqi citizenship. The Assyrians were now without their leader, and the patriarch was without his people. Metropolitan Mar Yosip Khananisho (1893–1977), acting as deputy, conducted the affairs of the Church in Iraq.

The situation was also explosive because since 1919 the Assyrians had provided the British occupying forces with troops, the so-called Assyrian Levies. Since the British had again and again used the Christian Assyrian Levies to suppress Kurdish and Arab revolts, they were accordingly hated by the Muslims. The situation deteriorated further when a British–Iraqi plan announced the dispersal throughout the country of the Assyrians, who had until then lived homogeneously in refugee camps; the Assyrians were to be settled in Kurdish, Sunni and Shi'ite villages, which spelled the destruction of their political and cultural identity.

At the end of the British mandate a group of Assyrians decided in July 1933 to emigrate to Syria and settle in the Little Khabur in the north-east of the country, since Assyrian refugees were already living there. The emigrating Assyrians were followed close on their heels by Iraqi government troops as far as the border. When the armed Assyrians returned from their negotiations with the French to the families they had left behind on the Iraqi side of the border, the Iraqi troops opened fire. Some Assyrians successfully fled to Syria; the others were taken prisoner and murdered. This border incident gave the Iraqi military the opportunity to distinguish themselves in the absence of King Faisal I (ruled 1921–1933), who was staying in Switzerland for health reasons, by solving 'the Assyrian question'. Beginning on 7 August 1933 the Iraqi army, led by the Kurdish general Badr Sidqi, attacked 95 Assyrian villages and tent settlements, 65 of which they relentlessly plundered and destroyed. The defenceless civilian population was indiscriminately massacred. Among the acts of cruelty were not only the torture of priests and the rape of women but also small children being run over by large vehicles or thrown into the air to be impaled on bayonets, and pregnant women likewise killed with bayonets. The tragic highpoint was the massacre in the village of Simel; over the course of about ten days, over 3000 innocent people died. Only those who meekly converted to Islam could save themselves. But General Bakr Sidqi, who was responsible for the massacre, was celebrated as a hero in Baghdad and received from King Ghazi I (ruled 1933–1939) a medal and the title of pasha.[62]

For the surviving Assyrians it was crushing to experience the fact that an Islamic state, only a few months after the establishment of sovereignty, could allow itself to butcher members of a religious minority with impunity. No one reacted; Great Britain helped Iraq to hush up what had happened, and the League of Nations appointed a commission. This commission did not consider at all how the security of the

Assyrians in Iraq could be ensured, but instead recommended that the Assyrians 'simply' move to Argentina, Brazil, British Guyana, Canada, Colombia, Niger or South Africa, and thus the Assyrians had the status of refugees within their own homeland.[63] The affected people paid little attention to these naïve recommendations, however; a few hid in the Kurdish region of Iraq, and others fled to the refugee camp of Habbaniyah west of Baghdad, where Great Britain maintained an air force base. In May 1941 the remaining Assyrian Levies had the satisfaction of successfully defending the base at Habbaniyah, together with the British, against 15,000 Iraqi soldiers and defeating the military putsch of the officers who sympathized with Nazi Germany. Their units were dissolved in 1955.[64] About half of the Assyrians left Iraq, with some accepting France's offer to settle in Syrian Khabur and others emigrating to the United States, especially to Chicago.

The Iraqi Chaldeans, by contrast, who now greatly outnumbered the Nestorians, were hardly affected by persecutions, as they had, under the leadership of their patriarch Emmanuel II Thomas, given up any claim to political and territorial autonomy and consciously assimilated into Iraqi society. While Mar Shimun XXI had to live in exile, Emmanuel II sat in the Iraqi Senate until his death in 1947. His three successors – Joseph VII Ghanima (1947–1958), who was likewise a senator, Paul II Cheiko (1958–1989) and Raphael II Bidawid (1989–2003) – advanced a cautious strategy of submissiveness towards the ruling authorities, which guaranteed the Chaldeans relative peace, despite three revolutions and three wars. In contrast to the Chaldean Church, which distanced itself from nationalist ambitions, the Church of the East appropriated the goal of an Assyrian national state in the 1920s and 1930s, an effort at which they inevitably failed. The Assyrians were a small community fraught with internal debates, whose scattered territories overlapped those of the vastly more numerous Kurds, so they could not realistically claim their own state. The failure of the Assyrian movement in the summer of 1933 dragged the Church with it into the abyss.

Why did the Church of the East collapse?

The disintegration of organisms – be they living things, state organizations, societal structures or religious institutions – is part of life. Nevertheless, it is extraordinary that a Church that from the beginning belonged to the extremely successful Christian religion shrank from seven to eight millions to 400,000 members, or that its share of the world population decreased from about 2–3 per cent during the Middle Ages to 0.005 per cent. Numerous external and internal reasons account for this, of which no single one but rather their combination was decisive.[65] Nine external reasons contributed. First, the Church of the East was isolated from its sister Churches and spread itself over enormous distances. This factor was especially serious when wars prevented all communication between the patriarchate and distant provinces, sometimes for years. Second, the Church, except in Mesopotamia, remained numerically weak in relation to the overall population; it never achieved the critical mass necessary to become generally accepted but remained a minority religion. Third, it never experienced the advantage of becoming a state religion; it was always dependent on the goodwill of non-Christian rulers and was correspondingly vulnerable. Fourth, in Asia East Syrian Christianity encountered strong, deeply rooted religions, such as Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. The three Far Eastern religions were so closely tied to the cultures and mindsets of the local people – and had indeed helped to create these – that an aura of foreignness always clung to the Christian message. In contrast, the Latin Church met with

a more favourable situation in the third/fourth centuries, since the Roman religion had long since hardened into state propaganda, and the Gallic, Celtic and Germanic religions gave no answers to many existential questions.

Fifth, the Church and its members faced persecutions, often lasting for centuries, and serious social discrimination, which led quite a few Christians, despite the awe-inspiring general resistance, to convert to the state religion. Six, the East Syrians of Kurdistan lived in a narrow social and geographical ghetto, which resulted in a self-focused life and a lack of intellectual development. Seventh, the activities of Catholic and Protestant missionaries hastened the decline of the already greatly weakened Church. Eighth, the East Syrians were twice the victims of a general genocide – first in the late fourteenth century by Tamerlane, and then in 1915/1918 by the Turks and Kurds. Ninth, the Church saw itself confronted with an essentially intolerant religion, Islam, which dictated not only the forms of society but also law and the administration of justice as soon as it achieved a majority in a state.

The last two points demonstrate the relative validity of the argument of the Muslim theologian Ali at-Tabari (†855), a former Christian. In his *Refutation of Christianity*, he wrote that no religion without a concept of holy war could survive. He referred to the triumph of Islam, which had succeeded and greatly weakened Christianity everywhere, that no one had met it with armed force.[66] A passing glance at history shows that, in confrontation with an aggressive religion equipped with military means, only a religion supported by another armed power can maintain itself over the long term. Regions that once had predominantly Christian populations were either radically cleansed of Christians – as happened, for instance, in Anatolia and North Africa – or the Christians came to constitute only a small minority, as in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Egypt. In contrast, in Christian Europe, it was military operations that either stopped Islam or repulsed it – as, for example, at the Battle of Tours and Poitiers in 732, the *Reconquista* of Spain in the fifteenth century and at both sieges of Vienna in 1529 and 1638. Since in Islamic states conversion from Christianity to Islam was desired, while conversion from Islam to Christianity usually brought the death penalty, the Church of the East was always at a disadvantage in the competition with Islam.

To these external reasons should be added two internal ones. First, the Church of the East focused its efforts on the ruling classes, because it was dependent on them, but neglected to work for the conversion of the general population. This strategy had the consequence that, upon a change of heart in the ruler or a regime change, the Church found itself isolated, with no foundation among the people. Second, the Church was often plagued by internal conflicts, arguments among personnel and schisms, which greatly weakened it and alienated the faithful from the clerical hierarchy. While large organizations such as the Catholic Church could weather internal power struggles and divisions, these were disasters for smaller groups situated in hostile environments.

XII The Renaissance of the Assyrian Church of the East

Rebuilding in exile

When the 25-year-old patriarch Mar Shimun XXI was deported to Cyprus in 1933 as stateless, he faced a Herculean task. His community was dispersed throughout the world, the few surviving bishops and priests had little access to higher education, and he himself was separated from the faithful in Iraq, Iran and Syria. The Church faced dissolution or the threat of another schism if the East Syrians remaining in Iraq elected another leader. In order to save the Church, Mar Shimun had to hold together the scattered diaspora, ease the acute shortage of priests and establish a new Church hierarchy, no longer tied to tribal structures. At the same time, he had to perform the difficult balancing act of finding a long-term compromise with the Iraqi govern-ment, without forfeiting the favour of the groups living abroad and fighting for a sovereign Assyrian nation. Equally complex were the attempts to reach a rapprochement with the Chaldean sister Church. Although Mar Shimun did not succeed in freeing the Church entirely from the demands of politics and tribal pressures, which contributed to bring about the tragic schism of 1968, his achievements remain undisputed, for during his 55-year patriarchate – one of the longest in history – he rebuilt the Church and promoted the translation and dissemination of classical theological writings. His efforts for the Church are all the more admirable given that he never chose this difficult path but had it imposed on him when he was still a child.

After a long odyssey, Mar Shimun settled in Chicago in 1940, where he received American citizenship in 1949. He chose Chicago, where a large diaspora community lived and where the Indian metropolitan Timothy had already established a parish in 1924, as the patriarchal see. At first, during appearances before the League of Nations, the world security conference in 1945 and the United Nations in 1947, the patriarch argued again in vain to secure an Assyrian territorial homeland. Presumably the failure of the short-lived autonomous Kurdish Republic of Mahabad, which existed by the grace of Stalin, led to rethinking, as the Assyrians formerly living in the Soviet Union, who had supplied loyal troops in the Second World War and actively helped in the creation of the Republic of Mahabad, were in 1947/1948 the victims of brutal Iranian repression, after the United States and Great Britain gave Stalin an ultimatum, demanding withdrawal of his troops from Iranian Azerbaijan. The intervention of the patriarch at the United Nations had no effect – just like the subsequent appeals for aid by Tibet in 1950 and 1959. Unlike the Dalai Lama, who to this day hopes for a victory for justice, Mar Shimun recognized that all appeals to the Western great powers and to

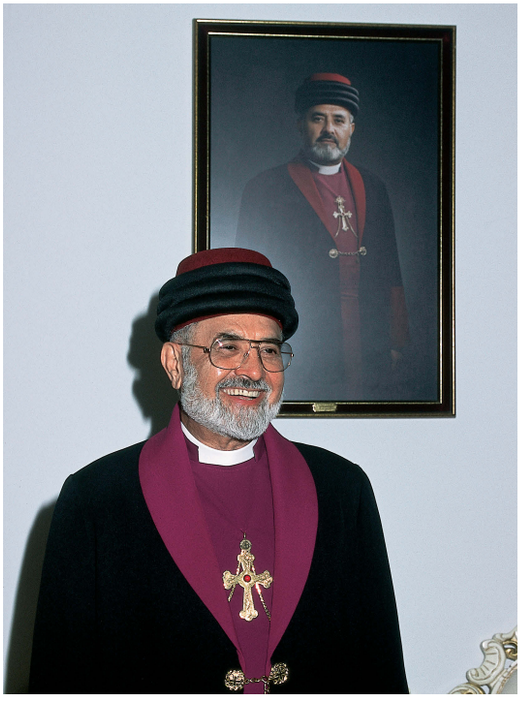
the international institutions they created, as well as the insistence on fulfilment of past promises, would be for naught. Thus he executed a radical about-face: he guaranteed his loyalty to the Shah of Iran and in 1948 ordered all Assyrians, especially those living in Iraq, to maintain loyalty to the governments of their respective homes.[1] This meant nothing less than the abandonment of the demand for an independent state.

Mar Shimun's concessions at first had no effect, but the Baath Party, which came to power in 1968, returned to him his Iraqi citizenship after he called upon the Assyrians of Iraq, in another pastoral letter in early 1970, to recognize the Iraqi authorities. Following this the government invited him to return to Baghdad, where he met President Al-Bakr and party leader Saddam Hussein. Al-Bakr – as the Abbasid caliphs once had done – acknowledged Mar Shimun, according to the presidential decree No 286 of 21 May 1970, as 'patriarch of the (Nestorian) Church of the East and supreme head of the Assyrian people in the Republic of Iraq'.[2] This recognition constituted an invaluable breakthrough, for a year earlier Al-Bakr had acknowledged the anti-patriarch Mar Thoma Darmo as the legitimate head of the Church and branded Mar Shimun as 'leader of a dangerous political movement that is cooperating with foreigners'. Now Mar Shimun was welcomed as an official dialogue partner with the government, and most of the property that had been confiscated by the government for the rival Church was restored to his Church.[3] However, Mar Shimun did not accept the offer to remain in Iraq and transfer the patriarchal residence to Baghdad, because he feared becoming involved in the government's struggle against the Kurds. In any case, many Assyrians never forgave Mar Shimun for passing up this historic opportunity. Today, in 2005, this history is repeating itself, as now Patriarch Mar Dinkha must decide if he will return to Iraq or remain in Chicago. Discussions held at the end of October 2005 between the Patriarch and Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Regional Government, indicate that a new patriarchal residence will be constructed at Ankawa, near Abil, northern Iraq. Hence the patriarch plans to return to Iraq in the near future.[4]

The Nestorian Chapel of St Stephen, built after 1950 on the ruins of a considerably older church, in Diana, northern Iraq.

Earlier, in 1964, two important events occurred. Pope John XXIII invited non-Catholic churches to send observers to the Second Vatican Council, whereupon Mar Shimun sent two delegates. It was an historic moment, as, for the first time since the Council of Ephesus of 431, East Syrian Christians again took part in a Western council. Unfortunately, in the same year there began a patriarchal schism brought about by old tribal conflicts. The occasion of this schism was provided by the change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, instituted by Mar Shimun in March, which was to enable the East Syrians to celebrate the great liturgical feasts at the same time as Catholics and Protestants. The tribal group of the Tyari, which was hostile to Mar Shimun's family, took advantage of this reform

and accused him of 'selling out' the Church to Rome. At first the tribal leaders persuaded a priest of Baghdad from the Tyari tribe by the name of Ishaq Nwiya to rebel, whereupon they won the support of the Indian metropolitan Mar Thoma Darmo, who was a firm opponent of hereditary succession to the patriarchate. In autumn 1968 the dissident metropolitan of India travelled to Baghdad, where he appointed as bishops two priests and an archdeacon, and they, for their part, immediately deposed Mar Shimun and consecrated Mar Thoma Darmo as the new patriarch.[5] The new Church chose the name Ancient Church of the East, and upon the death of their first patriarch, in 1969, they named Mar Addai II as his successor. It was these ancient and unfortunate conflicts which caused the attempts at reunion made by Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV to fail, when he proposed in 1980 the acknowledgement of ordinations carried out by bishops of either Church and offered Mar Addai the role of vice-patriarch in the reunited Church.[6]



Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV Khanaya was in office from 1976 until March 2015.

In early 1973 the Church of the East encountered further turbulence, as Mar Shimun announced his resignation after 53 years of service. Acceding to the plea of his bishops, he remained in office for another six months. But, when the bishops did nothing to arrange for succession, he announced in August his marriage to the Assyrian Emama Yukhanan. The subsequent episcopal synod resolved not only the abolition of patriarchal hereditary succession but also the revocation of the title of priest from the departing patriarch, his return to the lay state and the removal of his name from the official list of patriarchs. These measures were surely unjustified, since Mar Shimun had served the Church with devotion for more than half a century. Mar Shimun reacted angrily to this provocation; he reminded the bishops of the canon of the synod of 424, according to which the patriarch is accountable only to the tribunal of Christ, and withdrew his resignation. In order to avoid another schism, the bishops yielded and withdrew their resolutions. It was agreed that all the disputed questions would be settled at a synod to be held in Seattle, at the end of 1975. This synod did not take place, because on 6 November 1975 the young Assyrian David Malik Ismael, from the Tyari tribe, assassinated the patriarch. Even if personal motives were officially blamed for the murder, there are many indications that the patriarch was killed for political reasons, namely because of his reconciliation with Iraq. The murderer was sentenced in 1976 to life in prison, but was freed in 1988.[7] The tragic death of Mar Shimun paved the way for a return to the system of synodal patriarchal elections.

On 17 October 1976 the bishops' conference elected the metropolitan of Teheran and Iran as their new leader, who took the name Mar Dinkha IV Khanaya. The patriarch, who had been born in 1935 in the Iraqi village of

Derbenduk, near Arbil, came from a family that had already supplied 18 bishops. He studied with Metropolitan Mar Yosip Khananisho, who ordained him priest in 1957 and sent him to Teheran. In 1962 Mar Shimun elevated him to bishop, and in 1968 to metropolitan of Teheran and Iran. In this capacity he distinguished himself with various initiatives, such as ecumenical worship services and the founding of a seminary to address the chronic shortage of priests. Until the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988) Mar Dinkha resided in Teheran, but he then moved his residence to Chicago.

The new patriarch pursues the following four goals. First, he consistently advances the course begun by Mar Shimun XXI to lead the Church out of its isolation, but without denying its rich heritage. Thus, for instance, immediately upon his inauguration, while he confirmed his predecessor's decision to abandon the term 'Nestorian', he steadfastly refused, to give in to pressure from other institutions, namely the Coptic Church, and condemn Nestorius himself. Mar Dinkha uses the membership in the World Council of Churches, which had existed since 1948, to engage in various bi- and multilateral dialogues, with notable success. The later Common Christological Declaration, issued in 1994 with the Roman Catholic Church, the Joint Synodal Decree for Promoting Unity, in 1996 with the Chaldean Catholic Church, the Pastoral Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church, in 2001, and the Common Statement on Sacramental Life, in 2002 with the Roman Catholic Church, represent the most important milestones.[8] Another highpoint in the ecumenical dialogue was the joint consecration of the new patriarchal cathedral of Chicago together with the Chaldean patriarch Raphael Bidawid on 16 August 1997.[9]

Second, in his patriarchal inaugural address Mar Dinkha reaffirmed the intention to work together peacefully with the governments of the Middle East, thus rejecting Assyrian claims to the creation of their own territory.[10] Third, he wants to raise the level of theological education among his clergy. Thanks to successful ecumenical dialogue, Assyrians can study at the Chaldean Catholic College in Baghdad, and unmarried deacons and priests can study at the Catholic universities in Rome. It is Mar Dinkha's goal to appoint only theologians with doctorates as bishops, so that the ancient aura of scholarship will again surround the Church of the East. Fourth, he is working to overcome the unfortunate schism of 1968, an effort in which he has partially succeeded with the return of the important metropolitan see of India.

Assyrian Christians in the twenty-first century: a brief overview

By the year 2005 the Assyrian Church of the East numbered about 400,000 members and the Ancient Assyrian Church some 50,000–70,000. The leading clergy of the mother Church consisted of Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV, three metropolitans, eight bishops and Chorepiscopus Benjamin, who is acting head of the diocese of Iran. In Iraq at this time a few dioceses were not occupied, for political reasons. The Ancient Church, for its part, is led by Patriarch Mar Addai II, under whom serve four metropolitans and one bishop.[11] To these are added a few small Protestant groups, which include a total of about 10,000 members. In comparison, the Chaldean Catholic sister Church has some 650,000 members and its leading clergy eleven archbishops and bishops.

From a global perspective, the Church of the East remains endangered in its identity and its existence, despite the reforming efforts of Mar Shimun and Mar Dinkha. The reasons for this are of a political, organizational and spiritual

The new Church of St George in Bidial, Iraq, was erected in 2000, thanks to the financial support of the Kurdish leader Nechirvan Barzani, the Kurdish Organization for Reconstruction and German donors.

nature. The greatest cause for concern is the inexorable emigration of young people to the West – today more Assyrians live in the United States, Canada, Western Europe and Australia than in the Church's homeland of Mesopotamia and Iran. The political uncertainties there will not check this trend – quite the opposite. Only the return of the patriarch to Iraq will provide a powerful symbol to remain in their own land. Through this gradual uprooting, the Church is threatened with the loss of its cultural uniqueness. Even if the diaspora communities retain a high level of inner cohesion, adaptation to the Western environment leads inevitably among the second or third generation to the 'Westernization' of the exile communities. Consciousness of a singular history loses intensity, and the unifying bond of the East Syriac language loses effectiveness, as not all young Assyrians know it. The unfortunate schism of 1968 further weakened the East Syrian community; other divisions occurred in Sydney, Australia, in 1987 and in Modesto, California, in 1992.[12]

Still more serious for the future of the Church is a certain flagging of spiritual intensity, of which the extinction of monasticism at the beginning of the twentieth century is one of the most tragic signs. The last Nestorian hermit was the ascetic Rabban Yonan, who enjoyed the highest esteem as a calligrapher, clairvoyant and healer; he died in 1886. As the last monk, Rabban Werda died before the First World War.[13] The Church of the East once possessed hundreds of monasteries, but now it has not a single one.

However, a handful of nuns are again active in Kerala and Baghdad, which could signal the kernel of a monastic renaissance. A renewal of monasticism could kindle a new inner fire, which would place religious matters firmly in the foreground. Today many members of the diaspora expect the Church to engage increasingly in political debates. Patriarch Mar Dinkha is well aware of the corresponding traps: 'We want neither to become a museum of religious archaeology nor to serve politics, but rather we want to remain open to the revelation of the Holy Spirit.'[14] That this goal is not unrealistic is shown by the small East Syrian congregation of Kerala, which leads a vibrant, flourishing life in a stable environment.

Let us take just a brief look at the individual regions. About 90,000 Orthodox Assyrians, as well as 25,000 members of the Ancient Church, live in Iraq. In the secular Republic of Iraq (1958–2003), Article 19 of the constitution of 1958 guaranteed equality before the law to all citizens, regardless of language, ethnicity and religion. However, Article 4 of the constitution of 1970 elevated Islam to the state religion.[15] In the 250-member parliament in the 1980s, four seats were reserved for Christians of all denominations, who made up 3.4 per cent of the overall population. As in other Muslim states, the nominal equality of the Christians ran up against the strict limitations of Islamic social life and its codes of behaviour. In general, the Assyrians and Chaldeans remained loyal to Saddam Hussein, but not out of affection for the dictator but rather out of fear of renewed Kurdish violence and of a Shi'ite Islamic republic. For the Christians, Hussein's regime was the lesser evil. It was clear to the Christians that their relative security was due not to a particular Muslim tolerance but rather to the efficiency of the Iraqi security apparatus, which tolerated no socio-religious tensions.[16]

Nevertheless, the Assyrians and Chaldeans also suffered under the republic. Beginning in 1963 they fell between the fronts of the Kurds, who were seeking a broad autonomy, and the central government. As a result of the Iraqi purges in Kurdistan, over 200 Assyrian villages, churches and monasteries were destroyed, especially during the ruthless so-called Anfal campaign of 1988, after which countless Assyrians fled to the large cities of Mosul and Baghdad. After the United States created a Kurdish protective no-fly zone in the region north of the thirty-sixth parallel, beyond the area ruled by Saddam Hussein, in 1992, the Assyrians were again victims of numerous Kurdish attacks. The crimes, documented in part in reports by Amnesty International in 1995, 1997 and 1998, ranged from arbitrary seizure of property, extortion, the abduction of women, torture and murder

The facade of the Chaldean al-Tahra Church in Mosul, northern Iraq, was rebuilt in 1996/1997. The church, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, was founded in the seventh century and rebuilt in the thirteenth century. On 7 December 2004 the church and the neighbouring palace of the archbishop were attacked by terrorists and badly damaged by several bombs. The church was plundered and destroyed by jihadists of the Islamic State in early 2015.

to the assassination of the Assyrian governor of Arbil on 18 February 2001. But also in Saddam Hussein's Iraq, atrocities were carried out with ever greater frequency against the Christians, who were becoming increasingly associated with the Americans. One of the three Assyrian nuns suffered martyrdom in her residence in Baghdad when she was brutally murdered and beheaded on 15 August 2002.[17] Since the first Gulf War of 1990/1991 about 20 per cent of the Christians of Iraq – that is, almost 200,000 people – have left their homeland.[18]

The fall of Saddam Hussein in the spring of 2003 awoke among the Assyrians both hope and fear. They hope to be able finally to live a 'normal' life in a secular and somewhat democratic state, without religiously motivated discrimination. The appointment on 13 July 2003 of the secretary general of the Assyrian Democratic Movement, Yonathan Kanna, as representative of all Iraqi Christians in the provisional governing council gave further impetus to these aspirations. But there are worrying signs that the spirit of uncompromising Islamic militancy has been released from Pandora's box. In the Shi'ite south merchants who sell alcohol or music cassettes have been murdered, and Christian women forced to wear veils, as Muslim women do; in the Kurdish north abductions of young women are increasing. Christian women who do not wear veils are threatened with having their faces doused with caustic chemicals.[19] Official protests on the part of high-ranking Islamic notables help little, since speakers operating in the underground announce that it is no sin to kill Christians or to extort money from the relatives of kidnapped hostages. Additionally, the hatred of the defeated Sunnis towards the American and British occupying forces is extending to the Iraqi Christians. The aggressive missionary efforts on the part of at least nine American evangelical Churches, which seek to convert Iraqi Christians as well as Muslims – not least through the free distribution of aid, the arrangement of employment and the promise of visas for migration – not only weaken the local Churches but also make the American military campaign appear in the eyes of many Muslims as a religiously motivated crusade. The series of bombings carried out against Christian churches as of 1 August 2004, which resulted in dozens of dead and hundreds of wounded, accelerated the flight of Christians into exile, with about 50,000 Christians leaving Iraq after August 2004.[20] The Chaldean archbishop Louis Sako of Kirkuk described the situation thus: 'Earlier [under Saddam Hussein] we were not free, but we were secure. Today we are free, but not safe.'[21] Despite gross irregularities in the 30 January 2005 elections to the 275-seat Iraqi National Assembly, which deprived about 150,000 Christians from the region of Mosul of their vote, six representatives from the Assyrian-Chaldean community were elected. In the government it is represented by Mrs Basima Yousif Potrus from the Assyrian Democratic Movement; she serves as Minister of Science and Technology. The results of the referendum on the new Iraqi constitution on 15 October 2005 are for the Christians ambiguous. While it guarantees important civil rights and freedom of religion, it also stresses that no civil law may contradict Islam. In the long run it may undermine Iraq's territorial integrity. Finally, the Christians suffer from the fact that they make up only 3 per cent of the population and command no significant armed militia, as do the Kurds or Shi'ites.

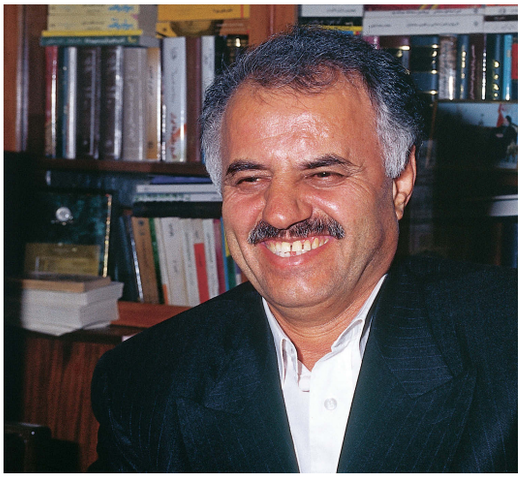
In Iran, after the repressions of 1947/1948, the Christians experienced a relatively peaceful period under the rule of Mohammed Reza Shah (ruled 1941–1979), but this came to an abrupt end with the seizure of power by Imam Khomeini (1900–1989) in 1979. The new constitution declared Islam the state religion but granted parliamentary representation to recognized minorities: the Armenians have two seats, the Assyrians and Chaldeans together have one, the

Zoroastrians and Jews have one each. Although the Christians of Iran, unlike their Iraqi brothers, were not called up for military service in the Iran–Iraq War, the Shi'ite Islamicization of all aspects of society was so radical that a genuine exodus took place – more than half the 250,000 Christians left Iran after 1979.

The thorough Islamicization of Iran led as early as August 1979 to the expulsion of all non-Iranian Catholic priests, monks and nuns, so the Latin clergy was reduced within a month from 150 priests to six.[22] In the area of education, the control of the Islamic theocracy was especially overwhelming. Beginning in 1983 Christian religious education was forbidden in the remaining Christian schools and restricted to the churches; at the same time, a standardized catechism, which glorified Islam, was imposed on all Christian groups. The import of Christian books is also banned.[23]

Today almost twenty-five thousand Assyrians, two thousand Assyrian Protestants, one thousand five hundred Assyrian members of the Pentecostal mission and fewer than ten thousand Chaldeans lead a secluded, marginalized life, mostly in Teheran and the region around Urmiah. To the Assyrians and Chaldeans are added about 80,000 Armenians, although a cultural divide separates the two groups from one another. Today the Christians constitute only 0.2 per cent of the general population; in light of the ongoing emigration of young Christians, it is feared that Iran will soon be devoid of any Christian presence. The election of the conservative hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the new president of Iran on 24 June 2005 could further add pressure on the Christians.

Although the constitution proclaims the equality of all Iranian citizens, Christians and Christianity are subject to numerous discriminatory measures. For instance, according to *sharia*, Islamic law, conversion from Islam to Christianity should result in the death penalty.



Mr Yonathan Bet Kolia represents the interests of the Assyrians and Chaldeans of Iran in the Iranian National Parliament; in February 2004 he was re-elected to a second term in office with 75 per cent of the votes cast. The outstanding result is attributable to his successful efforts to abolish the blood money laws that had discriminated against Christians.

But these conversions, which are extremely rare, seldom lead to official charges; the individuals in question are 'simply' murdered or suffer traffic accidents. Efforts promoting conversion are also strictly forbidden, so Christian communities are highly suspicious of potential converts, out of fear of agents provocateurs. On the other hand, a Christian who converts to Islam can claim the entire inheritance of deceased relatives if the other heirs remain Christian. Political offices and civil service positions are unattainable for Christians. However, the discriminatory law according to which the blood money to be paid for a killed Christian amounted to only one-thirteenth of that for a Muslim man, and for a Christian woman just one-twenty-sixth, was repealed by the National Parliament on 29 December 2003.[24]

In the once purely Christian land of Turkey, Christians constitute some 0.1 per cent of the population, concentrated in the major cities of Istanbul and Izmir. Fewer than 3000 Syrian-Orthodox live in Tur Abdin, and fewer than 1000 Nestorians in Hakkari. In the case of Turkey, it is especially scandalous that in this formally secular state persecutions of Christians still occurred between 1970 and 2000. The Christian farmers of Tur Abdin were brutally repressed by both the

In the foreground the old Church of the Virgin Mary, and behind it the new church, built in 1965, in the city of Urmiah, Iran. The Church of the Virgin Mary is one of the oldest in the region and is said to date back to the fourth century. The church, remodelled in the Russian Orthodox style in 1898, was destroyed by the Kurds in 1918, after which it was rebuilt on a more modest scale. The entrance leads first into a deep crypt and only then into the nave of the church.

Turkish army and the Kurdish workers' party, the PKK, so that the Christian population there emigrated and shrank from about 50,000 to fewer than 3000. That a narrow-minded nationalism, which negates all non-Turks, still predominates is shown by the decree issued on 6 October 1997 by the governor of Mardin, according to which the teaching of the Old Syriac language in monasteries is strictly forbidden.[25]

To this day the Turkish state steadfastly denies the massacres carried out against the Armenians, Syrian Orthodox and Assyrians; it speaks of 'normal' warfare. That this matter is highly sensitive for the Turkish government is shown by the brusque reactions to advances from foreign countries: when the French National Assembly publicly acknowledged the Armenian genocide in 2001 the Turkish government cancelled contracts with French industry on the scale of US$ 600 million, and when the Swiss National Assembly took the same step in December 2003 the long-planned visit to Turkey by the Swiss foreign minister was called off at short notice. In Tur Abdin the situation eased somewhat after the arrest of the Kurdish leader Öcalan in 1999 and the subsequent renunciation of violence by the PKK. In addition, the upcoming negotiations regarding entry into the European Union have motivated the Turkish government to uphold the constitutional rights of Turkish Christians in Tur Abdin. However, this policy of reconciliation suffered a setback on 17 July 2004, when the Christian mayor of the village of Dayro Daslibo – which means in the Syriac Turoyo dialect 'Monastery of the Cross' – was murdered because he refused to sign over to her kidnappers the land belonging to a Christian woman who had been abducted and forced to convert to Islam.[26] This murder continued the strategy, used in the 1980s and 1990s, of murdering Christians who would

not cede their land to Muslims.

The approximately 25,000 Assyrians living in Syria enjoy a freedom and security uncommon for Christians in the Middle East. Since Syrian independence in 1946, Christians have been able to participate in public life within the framework of the leadership of President Hafez Assad (in office 1971–2000) and his son and successor Bashar Assad (in office from 2000). The relatively liberal climate is revealed not least by the fact that four patriarchates have their seats in Damascus.[27] In Syria, where the government is strongly supported by the military, there is no state religion; only the president must be Muslim. Syria is a multi-religious state with 18 more or less large and active religious groups, of which the eleven Christian Churches together number almost a million faithful, constituting about 5 per cent of the general population.[28] Since Syria rejects confessionalism, no religious minority has claim to fixed parliamentary representation, which leads to clear under-representation. Additionally, Christians living in outlying rural areas often suffer discrimination, which has led to an inexorable flight to Damascus and into foreign exile. Unlike the Assyrians of Syria living in the region of Khabur and in Damascus, the 5000 Assyrians living in Lebanon are less well integrated into society, as for many of these refugees, who are often illegal immigrants, Lebanon is only a way station on the journey to Western Europe or the United States.

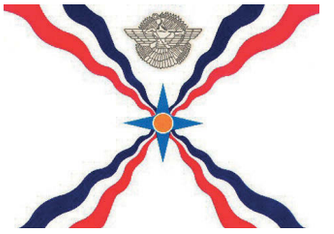
With regard to the widely scattered Assyrian diaspora, the largest communities are found in the United States, with over 100,000; Canada, with 20,000; Australia and New Zealand, with 25,000; Europe, with 30,000; and Russia, Armenia and Georgia, with 50,000 members. Within Europe, Sweden, France and Germany have small clusters of Assyrians.[29]

The East Syrian Church of Kerala, numbering 30,000 members and concentrated around the region of Trichur, is undoubtedly the most fortunate of the Nestorian communities, as its members, like those in the Western diaspora, are subject to no – at least no serious – discriminatory measures; at the same time, they live in their ancestral homeland. They are cared for not only pastorally but also socially by 73 priests and deacons, two deaconesses and a few nuns, under the leadership of the very active metropolitan Dr Dr Mar Aprem, and the Church operates a seminary, three schools, two kindergartens, an orphanage and a home for the elderly. The East Syrian Church of South India feels justifiably proud to be the descendant of one of the most ancient Christian communities.

The identity of the Church of the East

The Church of the East stands before two fundamental questions: what can it do to preserve the identity of its membership? While the Assyrians remaining in the Middle East are bound to and dependent on one another because of their shared experiences, often of suffering, in their difficult environment, which nourishes their identity, members of the second and third generations of expatriates were mostly born in exile. They adopt the local culture and often no longer know Syriac. How can the Church address these heterogeneous groups? Thus is revealed the second basic question: how should the Church define its purpose, its reason for existence?

The patriarch answers the question thus: 'Two paths are open to the Church. Either it defines itself according to the ethnic component, the Assyrian identity and its history. Then it will become the instrument of worldly objectives. Or it perceives its task as religious. Then its purpose consists in spreading the Good News, whether in Syriac, English or any other language. Although the Old Syriac language is an important factor in



The official Assyrian flag. The golden circle in the centre of the blue star symbolizes the ancient sun god Shamash, and the three broadening lines flowing out from the centre represent the three most important rivers of Assyria: blue, the Euphrates; white, the Great Zab; and red, the Tigris. Above the cross there sits enthroned Ashur, the highest god in ancient Assyria.

Modern Assyrians celebrating the Assyrian New Year 6752 in the region of Khabur, north-eastern Syria, at the same time as a mass wedding of 16 couples. The Assyrian appearance of the scenery and the escorts dressed as Assyrian royal couples, priestesses and warriors express the desire to connect with the ancient Assyrian national conscious-ness. The beginning of the Assyrian year 6752 fell on 1 April 2002.

our solidarity, it is only an instrument, not the religion itself. We want to avoid the fate that our Church once suffered in China. Then it refused to integrate itself into Chinese culture, insisting on the use of the Syriac language. For this reason we translate our sacred texts into local languages, so that the faithful can read the liturgical texts and follow the traditional customs.'[30]

While this response rejects the concept of a politically active national Church, Mar Dinkha is aware that it must also speak to people in their everyday lives: 'The faithful are less interested in theological discourse than in advice, guidance and help. This is the task of the priest; he should lead the faithful to a Christian life and to spirituality. We are also confronted with new questions, such as, for instance, abortion and *in vitro* fertilization, both of which we reject, or organ transplants, which we approve, for Christ also sacrificed his body for human beings. We may not leave our faithful alone with these difficult questions; we must be engaged and, with the help of the Holy Spirit, define our positions. We must be open to new questions and to the continual revelation of the Holy Spirit.'[31]

By viewing the work of the Church primarily not in the ethnic-political realm but rather along religious, pastoral and cultural vectors, Mar Dinkha consciously breaks with centuries of tradition, according to which the patriarch also takes on a leading political role. The arena of the Church is not political but existential. Limiting the Church of the East to an Assyrian national Church would not only exclude

the Indian community but also deny its own glorious past, when East Syrian missionaries travelled to Central Asia, China and Mongolia. Such a narrower focus would also make more difficult the ecumenical dialogue promoted by the patriarch. Finally, one can speculate that one day Islam could lose its status as state religion in the nations of the Middle East. At such a moment it would be conceivable that those people who were oppressed in the name of Islam might prefer another religion. In this case, a universal Church of the East, with roots in the Orient, would have a greater chance of success than an Assyrian national Church.

Ecumenical dialogue

One of the chief goals of Mar Dinkha IV is finally to lead the Church of the East out of its historical isolation. Over the course of this process he has had a few spectacular successes, which represent milestones in the history of the Church. In his efforts at ecumenical dialogue, the patriarch has a famous forerunner in Mar Odisho (†1318), the last outstanding theologian of the Church. He was convinced that the differences and disputes among the three great Christian communities of his time were founded only on words and terms, not in the religious ideas they expressed.[32] The Dominican Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, who lived in Baghdad from 1290 to 1300, was of the same opinion: 'One must not debate the distinctions among the rites, but rather one should seek common ground in faith. There is no Nestorian, Greek or Latin faith, but a single Christian faith.'[33]

An initial breakthrough occurred on 11 November 1994, when Pope John Paul II and Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV concluded with the signing in Rome of the Common Christological Declaration the first step in the theological dialogue that had begun in 1984. The most important sections of the text read: '[the undersigned] consider this meeting as a basic step on the way towards the full communion to be restored between their Churches. […] As heirs and guardians of the faith received from the Apostles as formulated by our common Fathers in the Nicene Creed, we confess one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, begotten of the Father from all eternity who, in the fullness of time, came down from heaven and became man for our salvation. The Word of God, the second Person of the Holy Trinity, became incarnate by the power of the Holy Spirit in assuming from the holy Virgin Mary a body animated by a rational soul, with which he was indissolubly united from the moment of his conception. Therefore our Lord Jesus Christ is true God and true man, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, consubstantial with the Father and consubstantial with us in all things but sin. His divinity and his humanity are united in one person, without confusion or change, without division or separation. […] [The] Assyrian Church of the East is praying the Virgin Mary as "the Mother of Christ our God and Saviour". In the light of this same faith the Catholic tradition addresses the Virgin Mary as "the Mother of God" and also as "the Mother of Christ". We both recognize the legitimacy and rightness of these expressions of the same faith and we both respect the preference of each Church in her liturgical life and piety. […] The Lord's Spirit permits us to understand better today that the divisions brought about in this way were due in large part to misunderstandings. […] The par-ticular Catholic Churches and the particular Assyrian Churches can recognize each other as sister Churches. To be full and entire, communion presupposes the unanimity concerning the content of the faith, the sacraments and the constitution of the Church.'[34] A declaration similar in spirit had been signed in 1984 between the Syrian Orthodox patriarch Ignatius Zakka I

Paper collage painted over with pigments by the Christian artist Farashta Nadir Khani from Teheran, Iran, 2001. The work shows the sudarium of Christ and the standing Saviour. Thus does the artist not only unite the aspects of Christ's passion and resurrection but also builds a bridge to the legendary origins of the Church of the East in Edessa. According to a tradition from the sixth century, Jesus pressed an image of his face onto a linen cloth and gave it to Abgar's ambassador Hanan, so that he might present it to the king. Private collection.

and Pope John Paul II.[35]

The common declaration of 1994 is based on the formula of reconciliation from 433.[36] Against this background, it is clear that the formula of reconciliation of 433, which was signed by all parties directly involved in the conflict, would have enabled the avoidance of the division of the Christian community into three separate and mutually hostile Churches, had not purely political factors stood in the foreground. The Christological formula of 433 failed not for theological reasons but because a few of the protagonists did not want reconciliation but, rather, the humiliation of their opponents.

In their addresses, both Church leaders stressed the significance of the newly signed declaration. Pope John Paul emphasized first in the general audience and then in his discourse to the patriarch: 'This will settle and definitely put an end to more than fifteen centuries of misunderstandings that afflict our faith in Christ, true God and true Man, born to the Virgin Mary by the Holy Spirit. […] We all recognize that it is of supreme importance to understand, venerate, preserve and foster the rich heritage of each of our Churches, and that a diversity of customs and observances is in no way an obstacle to unity.'[37] Mar Dinkha responded: 'Today the time has come to bring down the walls which have separated us and kept us apart for fifteen centuries.'[38]

This common Catholic–Assyrian declaration prepared the way for a deeper dialogue with the Chaldean sister Church, which led in November 1996 to the Joint Synodal Decree for Promoting Unity. In this Mar Dinkha IV and Mar Raphael I Bidawid affirmed the following goal: 'In the service of our Lord and the People of God, we, the bishops of the two branches of the ancient Church of the East, declare the noble quest for restoring Christian unity remains, for us and for our Churches, a profound Christian obligation.' Among the action plans were the establishment of a joint commission for unity, creation of a common catechism, the founding of shared seminaries, promotion of the Aramaic liturgical language, and ecclesiastical and cultural cooperation in dioceses and parish congregations. This goal and the strategies to reach it were confirmed on 15 August 1997 at a joint synod, led by both patriarchs, in which 17 Chaldean and ten Assyrian bishops participated. In the synodal concluding document, the most significant hurdles on the path to unity were precisely formulated. The Assyrian Church demanded the 'preservation of her ecclesial identity as expressed in her liturgical, theological, spiritual and disciplinary patrimony […] and the recognition of her freedom and self-governance', while the Chaldean Church requested 'the full preservation of her full communion with the Roman See'.[39] It is the papal claim to

authority that makes the reconciliation of the two claims immensely difficult. In the political and social arena, however, the idea of an Assyrian-Chaldean people forms a strong, shared platform.

The sacraments form the second great theme within the Assyrian–Catholic dialogue. An initial result was achieved in October 2001 with the Pastoral Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church. This permits Assyrians to participate in the Eucharist in Chaldean liturgies in emergency situations, and vice versa.[40] This intercommunion primarily enables those Iraqi and Assyrian Christians whose congregations have no priests of their own to participate in communion. Along these same lines there followed in November 2002 the Common Statement on Sacramental Life between the Catholic Church and the Church of the East, which ensures the full theological recognition by each Church of the sacraments of the other; however, ratification by the two synods is still pending.[41] With the new Chaldean patriarch Mar Emmanuel III, who sympathizes with the Assyrians, cooperation is expected to deepen further. Like Mar Dinkha, he wants to maintain the East Syrian rite and rejects both any Latinization of the liturgy and the replacement of Syriac with Arabic as the liturgical language, as advocated by the Dominicans.[42]

The third theme, not yet taken up, concerns Church organization. One hopes that the Roman Catholic claims of papal primacy and infallibility will not cause the efforts towards unity between the two East Syrian sister Churches to founder.

While, in the Catholic–Assyrian dialogue, results as spectacular as they were unexpected have been achieved, discussions with the Coptic Orthodox Church have proved significantly more difficult; they reached a dead end in 1998. Although the Church of the East has been a member of the World Council of Churches since 1948, it has been barred membership in the Church Council of the Middle East by the Coptic Church. Back in 1984 the Coptic Church rejected the Assyrian request for membership, and ten years later renewed negotiations were begun. Although in the summer of 1997 the East Syrian bishops' synod unilaterally and unconditionally repealed the anathemata against the Miaphysite patriarchs Cyril of Alexandria and Severus of Antioch, which dated back to the fifth and sixth centuries,[43] the Coptic pope Shenouda III (in office 1971–2012) rejected the renewed Assyrian application for membership in October 1998.[44] Shenouda's precondition that the Church of the East should first condemn its own Church Fathers, Nestorius, Theodore and Diodore, who are celebrated in the East Syrian calendar on 4 February on the 'Commemoration of the Three Greek Fathers', is entirely unacceptable to Mar Dinkha.[45] The Church of the East rejected as unsatisfactory the observer status offered as an alternative to membership. That a quarrel some 1570 years old still today stands in the way of ecclesiastical reconciliation is beyond understanding.[46] Fortunately, the chilly attitude of the Copts has not prevented the other Miaphysite

Dance performance at an Assyrian New Year's festival for the year 6752 (1 April 2002) and mass wedding in Khabur, north-eastern Syria.

The former Mar Shalita Cathedral of Kotchannes, abandoned since 1915, in the Turkish Hakkari Mountains, is symbolic for the Church of the East. The faithful were driven out, but the church walls still stand like a lonely Christian watchtower. It is to be hoped that, upon the eventual admission of Turkey into the European Union, the domestic political situation will improve to the point that the former patriarchal basilica may be rebuilt and the Assyrians living in Syrian, European and American exile may return to the homeland of their forefathers. The return of the descendants of the one-time mountain Nestorians of Hakkari and the reconstruction of the Mar Shalita Cathedral would be clear signs of the guarantee of genuine religious freedom in Turkey.

Churches from establishing good and cooperative relations with the Church of the East.

The relevance of the Church of the East and its theology

The Church of the East is *the* martyr Church of history. No other Church has made so many sacrifices through the steadfastness of its confessing members, who countered oppression and persecution with the strength of their faith. It is also a confessors' Church, insofar as its missionaries poured out to the borders of the world then known in Mesopotamia – to India, Central Asia, Tibet and China, and to the Mongols. The Church can rightly be proud of its past; one hopes that it can create from this consciousness the inner strength to withstand further trials.

At this time it faces two immense tasks. First, it must build up in its homeland of Mesopotamia – that is, Iraq – sufficient presence that the Iraqi Assyrians remain in their land and do not choose exile. For this, the closest possible cooperation with the numerically stronger Chaldean Catholic Church is indispensable, as is a massive and rapid increase in clergy. The second task consists in caring for the diaspora, a rapidly growing proportion of the Church, in such a way that people can preserve their unique identity.

The path adopted by Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV of a renewal of the dimensions of religiosity, spirituality, pastoral care, humanitarianism and cultural work is the only correct one. The Church has enough exceptional features to work out its unique profile. Among these are: first, its primordial, almost archaic liturgy; second, the use of a liturgical language closely related to the language of Jesus; third, a rich mysticism; fourth, the lack of the always problematic priestly celibacy; and, fifth, the absence of the stifling idea of original sin, which leads to, sixth, an emphasis on free will. The patriarch outlines it thus: 'An important characteristic of our faith is the emphasis on free will. As the man Jesus Christ died on the cross out of free will, so do human beings have free choice between the wide streets of hell and the narrow path to paradise. We reject the concepts of original sin and predestination. All people are called, but everyone must make his or her own choices in life, the journey from birth to death; the Church can only lead and help the people.'[47]

The Church of the East is an Asian Church, which has preserved its Oriental roots. As such it has the potential to attract those people in Asia for whom the Catholic and Protestant Churches have less appeal. It is acceptable to fantasize that the grip Islam holds on the legislation of many states will one day be released. This would return to the people the option to choose which religion best accords with their ideas. In this moment, a politically independent and self-conscious Church of the East, with a strong presence in its Mesopotamian homeland, would be ideally positioned to offer seekers a new answer.

Silver cross on a Syrian manuscript, Khabur, north-eastern Syria.

XIII Recent Archaeological Discoveries, and Ecclesiastical and Political Developments

Recent archaeological discoveries

After the discovery and excavation of the important Nestorian monastic church of Urgut in Uzbekistan in 2004–7 (p. 169f), archaeological investigations also identified significant cultural relics of the Church of the East in Iraq, Central Asia, China and possibly also Mongolia.

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which corresponds in part to the former Nestorian archdiocese of Beth Garmai, stand the ruins of the monastic church Deir Bazyan, about 25 km west of Suleymaniyah. It was first mentioned in the first half of the nineteenth century by the scholar and traveller Claudius James Rich and roughly excavated in the early 1980s. A second campaign in 1987–90 produced poor results and the numismatic finds have been lost. However, a brief investigation in 2000 correctly identified the ruin as a paleo-Christian church. The scientific excavations starting in 2011 revealed a three-nave monastic church standing almost in the centre of a rectangular fortress, reinforced by towers which followed a circular floor plan. The church was founded between the fifth and sixth century in the Sassanian period and was in use at least until the ninth century. So far, it remains unclear whether the church was built before the fortress or concurrently. Then again, it was certainly not built after the fortress. At the entrance, there were stone boards decorated with typical Nestorian crosses. In the central nave, the *shqaqona* and the *bema* were exceptionally well preserved. Standing in the east of the church, behind the chancel and separated from it by a wall, was a *beth sahade*, a martyrion sheltering the relics of martyrs or holy monks.[1]

Ruins of the paleo-Christian Monastery of Deir Bazyan, Kurdistan Region, Iraq, dating from between the fifth and sixth century. In the centre stands the circle-shaped bema, behind it the narrow shqaqona leading to the chancel. Photo: 2009.

In Uzbekistan, the excavations conducted under the auspices of the Swiss Society for the Exploration of EurAsia at Qarshovul-tepe, north-east of Chinaz, Oasis of Chach (Tashkent), found a gravestone in a graveyard in 2012 bearing a roughly-scratched cross, but lacking any inscription. Two years earlier, an Uzbek

archaeologist had found a bronze cross on the ground at the same site. Until the excavations of 2015, no further finds had corroborated the hypothesis of a Christian presence at Qarshovul-tepe.[2] The discovery of coins suggests that this small city was inhabited from at least the fifth to the late eighth century. Previously, early medieval coins of Turkic rulers had been found at Kanka, south-east of Chinaz, and at other places, featuring a male face and a cross on the obverse side.[3]

In Kazakhstan, while the ongoing excavations at Kayalik, mentioned by Rubruk, did not bring any architectural Christian cultural relics to light, except for a piece of ceramic with an engraved cross, an important discovery was made in 2014 at Ilan Balik (today's Uch-Aral), eastern Kazakhstan. Ilan Balik is 174 km to the south-south-west of Kayalik and 53 km to the west of Almalik. During a survey, a Nestorian gravestone (kayrak) was found at Uch-Aral, where three small hoards of Karakhanid coins (eleventh century) and Dirham coins from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries were also discovered.[4] The 100cm-long, undated gravestone has an engraved Maltese cross on the main long side and an inscription in Turkic language and Syriac script. The preliminary translation from Dr Mark Dickens reads 'Tegin's son Petros, Baršabba Qucha's son [name illegible]', which means the kayrak was probably for two males.[5] A second cross is engraved on the top of the kayrak. The site of Ucharal is identical with ancient Ilan Balik, which was mentioned by the Armenian Cilician king Hethum I when he returned in 1254 from his tribute-bringing journey to the Mongol Great Khan Möngke.[6] The excavation of Ilan Balik will start in fall 2016 under the auspices of the Society for the Exploration of EurAsia.

In Central China, in the city of Luoyang, where a Nestorian monastery once stood during the Tang Dynasty (618–907), an inscribed stone pillar was found in May 2006.[7] The pillar, which was damaged while being cut away from its base, is around 85 cm high and has a circumference of 40 cm. It is octagonal in shape and strongly resembles Buddhist *dharani*[8] pillars, which were common during the Tang Dynasty. On the top of six of the eight sides, there is an image, twice a Nestorian cross standing above a lotus flower and flanked by a flying angel on each side. These flying angels are also similar to Buddhist iconography, since they resemble the flying heavenly messengers called *apsaras* at the

The Nestorian gravestone (kayrak) found in 2014 at Ilan Baliq, eastern Kazakhstan. Photo: 2014.

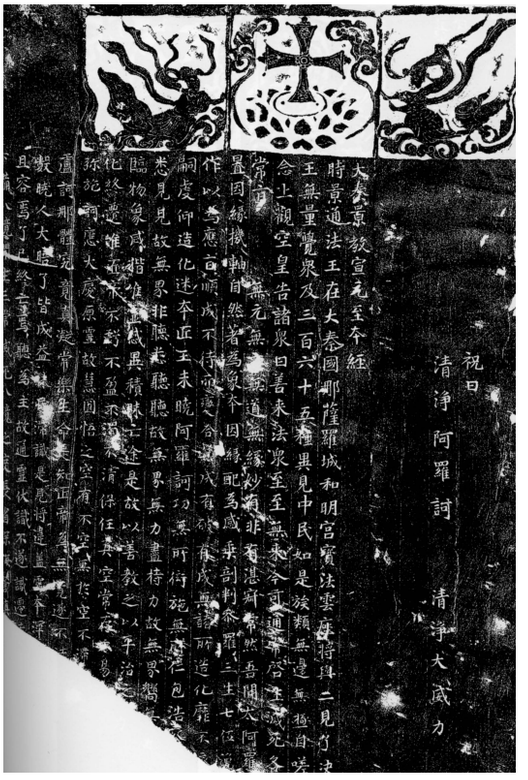
nearby caves of Longmen and in the murals of Dunhuang. The inscribed text in Chinese deals with the *Teaching on the Origin of Origins of the Da Qin Luminous Religion* and its second part is an epitaph honouring a Christian Sogdian woman. The inscription also records the names of the abbot of the Nestorian monastery of Luoyang, hence confirming its existence, and of eight other monks of Sogdian descent. The inscription gives the year 814/15 for the erection of the pillar and it records that it was relocated in the year 829.[9] The pillar was probably buried during the persecutions initiated by Emperor Wuzong in 843–45 against foreign, non-Chinese religions.[10]

When William of Rubruk stayed in 1254 in Karakorum at the court of Great Khan Möngke, he described the church of the residing Nestorian community:

> 'We reached the vicinity of Caracorum on Palm Sunday [5 April 1254]. At daybreak … we entered the city, raising the cross aloft on its banner and making our way as far as the church through the Saracean quarter. … The church … is a rather large and fine one, with its roof completely covered by silk cloth threaded with gold.'

Later on, Rubruk described the layout of the city, specifying that 'the one church [stands] at the far end of the town.'[11]

Based on Rubruk's description of the location of the Muslim quarter containing the bazar and on archaeological evidence, it may be inferred that his statement that the church stood at 'the far end' pointed to the north-eastern quarter of the city. During its work in the north-eastern sector from 2007–9, the German–Mongol Karakorum archaeological expedition indeed located a complex of houses oriented along the east-west line. This clearly distinguishes it from standard Mongol dwellings, which usually face the south. While the so-called 'northern house'



The Nestorian stone pillar found in 2006 in Luoyang, China.

seems to have served as a cultic building, large fragments of murals came to light, some of them with inscriptions, in the better-built, so-called 'eastern house'.[12] Although the tiny inscribed fragments cannot as yet be clearly attributed to a script, both Syriac or Uigur scripts are possible.[13] As the leading archaeologist Hans-Georg Hüttel wrote as a preliminary hypothesis, the 'eastern house' may be interpreted as a Nestorian church, which was converted in the fourteenth century into a Buddhist temple.[14]

Recent developments within the Church of the East

The ecumenical dialogue of the Assyrian Church of the East with the Roman Catholic Church had begun in November 1984, when the late Patriarch

Mar Dinkha IV visited the late Pope John Paul II at the Vatican. On the occasion of this visit, a mixed, later joint Theological Commission was established. Its fruitful work led to the Common Christological Declaration signed by both Church leaders on 11 November 1994.[15] The Declaration referred to the Nicaean Creed acknowledged by both Churches and recognized the legitimacy of the confessions concerning Jesus Christ and the Churches' specific venerations of the Virgin Mary. As the second step of the Assyrian–Roman Catholic dialogue, the formulation of a 'common understanding and mutual recognition of the Sacramental Life' was defined. The completed draft, allowing for a 'limited communion' that enjoyed mutual recognition under circumstances of 'pastoral necessity', has not yet been ratified, however. The third step defined by the Commission concerns Church organization and includes the major stumbling block of Papal primacy.

In 2004, a conflict emerged between Mar Ashur Bawai Soro, then Bishop of the Assyrian Diocese of California, and the other members of the Holy Synod. In an open letter to the Synod, Mar Soro stated that in his understanding a 'full communion' of Churches implied a recognition of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome 'as the successor of Peter', which also meant that a lack of full communion with Rome would nullify the apostolic order and invalidate the patriarchal primacy of the Church of the East. Bishop Soro was consequently suspended from his episcopal duties in 2005 and 'formally laicized and defrocked from all holy orders' by the Assyrian Holy Synod on 31 October 2008.[16] Later, the former bishop converted to the Chaldean-Catholic Church and was appointed Titular Bishop of Foratiana based in San Diego County, USA in 2014.

H.H. Mar Dinkha IV (b. 1935) passed away on 26 March 2015, after having served as Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East since 17 October 1976. Mar Aprem Mooken, Metropolitan for India, then assumed the patriarchal vicariate of the Church until the election of the new patriarch Mar Giwargis III Sliwa on 18 September and his formal consecration on 27 September 2015 as the 121st Catholicos-Patriarch of the Holy Apostolic See of Seleucia-Ctesiphon. Born Warda Daniel Sliwa in Habbaniya, Iraq in 1941, he was ordained as a priest in 1980 and consecrated as Metropolitan for Baghdad and all of Iraq in June 1981. At this point, he was also given the name Mar Giwargis. While the previous Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV resided in Chicago, USA, the new official residence of Patriarch Mar Giwargis III is Erbil, capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This change of location of the patriarchal see could not only be expected, since Mar Giwargis Sliwa served previously as Metropolitan of Baghdad and all of Iraq, based in Baghdad, but it was meant above all to encourage the Assyrian Christians to stay in the Church's heartland and

Catholicaos-Patriarch Mar Giwargis III (in office since 2015).

The Holy Synod of the Church of the East.

not to emigrate abroad.

In terms of organization, the Church is divided into three archdioceses and eight dioceses. The Holy Synod counts fourteen members, including the Catholicos-Patriarch.[17] Concerning the painful issue of the inner-Assyrian split between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Ancient Church of the East, headed since February 1970 by Mar Addai II,[18] a reunification has not been yet been achieved in spite of numerous attempts. The last one was in June 2015.

Recent political developments in Iraq and the plight of the Christians

The present author wrote the following in 2006 about the future of the Christians in Iraq: 'But there are worrying signs that [with the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003] the spirit of uncompromising Islamic militancy has been released from Pandora's Box'.[19] Unfortunately, the events since 2014 have justified those apprehensions. While the situation of the Assyrians and Chaldeans has remained relatively stable and secure within the autonomous Kurdistan Region – which commands its own armed forces, the Peshmerga, and has Erbil (also called Arbil) as its capital – it has deteriorated dramatically in the region of Mosul and the Niniveh Plains east and north of Mosul, one of the heartlands of Assyrians and Iraqi Christians. As the already precarious security situation of Assyrian Christians in Iraq started to worsen with bombing attacks on churches in Baghdad and Mosul in August 2004 and continued to decline over the next years with further anti-Christian attacks in Baghdad, Basra, Ramadi and Mosul in the forms of kidnapping, torture and murder, thousands of Assyrian Christians sought refuge in the Niniveh Plains close to the Kurdistan Region. There were hopes that a new province would be created in the Niniveh Plains

Chapel built in c. 2006 near the monastery hospice 'Our Saving Father' in Alqosh, Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Photo: 2009

that would serve as a safe zone for Christian Assyrians.

However, the Islamic State IS (الدولة الإسلامية); formerly called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant ISIS (الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام) attacked and captured Mosul, the second-largest city of Iraq, between 4 and 10 June 2014. This heterogeneous alliance is comprised of fanatical Iraqi Sunni jihadists, international Salafist jihadists from the Arabian Peninsula, North Africa, Pakistan, Northern Caucasus, and radicalized members of Muslim communities of Western Europe, as well as former Sunni Baathist senior army officers from Saddam Hussein's army. Although the defending Iraqi army outnumbered the attackers by approximately fifteen to one, its resistance was weak. The troops either ran away or joined the attackers, leaving behind their weapons and equipment. The jihadists thus not only conquered the city, but also gained a huge arsenal of modern American military equipment, including ammunition. The jihadists followed up on their victory in the following two months by also conquering in the Niniveh Plains the Christian cities of Qaraqosh (also called Bakhdida and al-Hamdaniya), and then Tal Kayf, Bartella and Karamlish, which the Kurdish defence troops abandoned on 6 August 2014.[20] But the Peshmerga and local Assyrian fighters managed to drive out the jihadists from the large Christian Assyrian village of Alqosh north of Mosul with its important monastery of Rabban Hormizd (p. 97). Today, the front line is at a distance of only 17 km from Alqosh. The

The Assyrian Mar Narsai Cathedral built in 2006 in Dohuk, Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Photo: 2009.

Chaldean monastery of Mar Mattai (p. 101) was also successfully defended.

The jihadist attack on Mosul and the Niniveh Plains gave rise to a huge wave of fugitives. Most of Mosul's approximately 60,000 to 70,000 Christians fled the city during the attacks. Those who remained were confronted with the ultimatum to either convert to Islam or to pay the jizya tribute inflicted on dhimmis (non-Muslim people of the Book), to leave the city on the spot without any belongings or to be killed.[21] More than 100,000 Christians had to seek refuge in Kurdistan, where they settled in the major cities, such as Erbil and its suburb Ankawa, or Dohuk and Suleymaniyah, which had already sheltered Christian refugees from war-torn Syria.[22] An especially cruel ordeal awaited younger Christian women who did not manage to flee and were captured by the jihadists of IS. Like Yezidi women, they were raped and sold at slave markets as sex slaves. Children were also sold as slaves. As reported in the press, 'customers' from Iraq, Syria and Saudi Arabia came and bought women for USD 200–300 'a piece'.[23] To help the refugees arriving in the region of Kurdistan, ACERO, the Assyrian Church of the East Relief Organization, founded in 2007, has launched various philanthropic programs, including an initiative to support housing and school construction.

Unique cultural heritage sites were also lost due to the jihadist barbarism. Not only were more than fifty churches and monasteries either destroyed or turned into secular buildings such

as prisons, garages and stores, but even locally venerated Muslim shrines, such as the famous Mosque of prophet Yunus (Jonah), built over the tomb of Patriarch Henanisho I (in office 685–701, see p. 145), were turned to rubble.

The advance of the Islamic State (then called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) into eastern and northern Syria as a consequence of the power vacuum created by the civil war that began in 2011 also severely endangers the Christians of Syria. In the spring of 2013, the jihadists and al-Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front, together with other rebel groups, seized control of the city of al-Raqqah, located about 160 km east of Aleppo. At the same time, the valley of the Khabur River, a tributary of the Euphrates, fell to the jihadists. It has served as a refuge to Assyrian Christians since the massacres committed by the Iraqi army in 1933.[24] In total, about 35,000 to 40,000 Assyrian Christians lived in eastern Syria prior to 2011. The Assyrian Christians were forced to flee in the face of the advance of the jihadists from the al-Nusra Front, either westward to Damascus or Lebanon or eastward to Dohuk in the Kurdistan Region. The al-Nusra jihadists were soon followed by the jihadists of ISIS, who took control of al-Raqqah in January 2014. As the author recalls, the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch, H.H. Ignatius IV Hazim (in office 1979–2012), anticipated the fate of the Christians in Syria and of the Syrian people in general when the author interviewed him in April 2002 in Damascus. The Patriarch was greatly concerned about the consequences of an American attack on Saddam Hussein looming on the horizon under the pretext that the Iraqi regime was developing weapons of mass destruction, since such an intervention could destabilize the whole of the Middle East. He worried that the fall of more or less secular dictators such as Saddam Hussein or Bashar al-Assad would leave the Christians without protection from lurking Islamist groups similar to the Arab jihadists supporting the Afghan Talibans. Unfortunately, the events that followed justified the Patriarch's fears.

Although the Christian Assyrian community is small, two armed militias have been formed which fight jointly with the Peshmerga against the jihadists. The Niniveh Plain Protection Unit was founded by the political party called Assyrian Democratic Movement ADM, and the Dwekh Nawsha (literally 'the one who sacrifices himself') was founded by the Assyrian Patriotic Party. Both militias count a few thousand men but only a minority of them is ready for combat.[25] Not only Assyrians, but also other Iraqis and even some Westerners have undergone training. The Assyrian minority is represented in both the national and regional parliaments according to the quota set for Christians. Since 2014, the Assyrians have held five seats out of 328 in the National Council of Representatives, the Majlis, and also five seats out of 111 in the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament.[26]

View from the monastery hospice 'Our Saving Father' in Alqosh, Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Photo: 2009.

In view of the hundreds of thousands of Christians who left Iraq since the infamous Anfal Campaign in 1988, the First Gulf War of 1990–1 and the chaotic mismanagement after the US invasion in 2003, the question of whether the Christians of Iraq have any future in their own homeland continues to dominate. The Assyrian and Chaldean Christians have lived in Iraq for almost two thousand years, about five hundred years longer than the Arab Muslims who spread Islam beginning in the seventh century. Yet Oriental Christianity in Iraq is threatened by extinction. There is also no doubt that the situation would be even bleaker without the safe haven of the Kurdistan Region. Christianity's long-term survival in Iraq will depend on four factors: first, the stability of the autonomous Kurdistan Region and its continued tolerant policy towards religious minorities; second, the overcoming of the Islamic State and the liberation of Mosul and the Niniveh Plains from its grasp; third, the establishment of an effective national Iraqi government in Baghdad which would prioritize a reconciliation with and the reintegration of the large Sunni minority, especially former Baathist officials and army officers; and fourth, but not least, Christians staying in their homelands and fighting for their own future.

Notes

Notes to illustration captions

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Notes to Chapter I

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4 Dates given in parentheses after names refer to lifespan, unless, as in cases of the reigns of rulers or patriarchs, otherwise indicated.
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13 A metropolitan see included six to twelve dioceses, which were, however, often vacant, especially in the Far East. The rough estimate of seven to eight million Nestorians follows from the following assumptions: Mesopotamia, 2–4 million; Iran, 1 million; Central Asia, 1 million; Mongols and China, 1.5 million; South India, 0.4 million; other places, 0.3 million. The figure of twelve million or more, found in the literature, seems to us to be too high. See: Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p.376.
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15 *Chronique de Séert. Histoire Nestorienne*, tome II/2, 1919. p.551.
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30 The word 'mar' is an abbreviation of the Syriac 'marya', meaning 'lord'. It is placed in front of the names of saints and bishops. In the East Syriac dialect of the Nestorians the vowel 'alif' is pronounced as 'a', and in the West Syriac of the Syrian Orthodox Church as 'o', so that 'mar' becomes 'mor'. See: Poizat, Bruno: *Les dialectes morts et vivants de l'araméen*, 2002. p.2.
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40 I am indebted to Mrs. Susan Khoshaba from Dehuk for abundant information relating to the present events within the Church and the Christian community of Iraq and to Dr Mark Dickens, who drew my attention to several inaccuracies and outdated information in the first edition.

Notes to Chapter II

1 Translated literally, the Greek word 'Mesopotamia' means 'land between the rivers'.
2 Upon the death of Herod Agrippa in 44 CE. Judea became a Roman province, governed by a procurator.
3 Seleucia-Ctesiphon lies about 30 kilometres south of Baghdad, for whose construction the ancient capital was exploited as a quarry after 762.
4 In 114 Emperor Trajan occupied the capital and advanced to the Persian Gulf. Later, Lucius Verus conquered Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 161 and 164, as did Septimus Severus in 193. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1998, vol.21, pp.950–954.
5 On Zoroastrianism, see pp.62f.
6 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1998, vol.8, pp.196ff.
7 Fischer, Karl Martin: *Das Urchristentum*, 1985. p.171.
8 Edward Gibbon, 1737–1794. From: *National Geographic Magazine*. German edition. December 2002. p.174.
9 Tröger, Karl-Wolfgang. *Das Christentum im zweiten Jahrhundert*, 1988. p.27.
10 Orthbrandt, Eberhard and Teuffen, Dietrich Hans: *Ein Kreuz und tausend Wege*, 1962. p.150.
11 Segal, J.B.: *Edessa: The Blessed City*, 1970. pp.57ff.
12 Robert, Jean: Des chrétiens en Iran, depuis quand?, 2003. p.7.
13 The American missionary Asahel Grant, who lived in Kurdistan and Iranian Azerbaijan from 1835 to 1840, proclaimed this conviction in the very title of his book: *The Nestorians; or the Lost Tribes*, 1841. See also: pp.IV, 62, 110, 141.
14 'Zebaoth' is the plural form of the Hebrew word 'saba', meaning 'army' or 'troops'. Rienecker, Fritz (ed.): *Lexikon zur Bibel*, 1962. p.968.
15 Ezra, 9–10.
16 Acts 11:19.
17 Acts 11:26. Fischer, Karl Martin: *Das Urchristentum*, 1985. p.131. Blanchetière, Françoise: Le moment de la séparation. In: *Le Monde de la Bible*. No.150, April/May 2003. p.32. The first step to accept non-Jews into the Christian community had, in fact, been taken by Apostle Peter when he baptized a few years after Jesus's death the Roman centurion Cornelius and his family without having them circumcised. Acts 10:1–11:18.
18 On the question of Jesus's siblings, see Mark 3:31; 6:3; John 5:7; Acts 1:14.
19 Gal 2:1–21. Fischer, Karl Martin: *Das Urchristentum*, 1985. pp.92–98, 114, 129. Zeller, Dieter (ed.): *Christentum I: Von den Anfängen bis zur konstantinischen Wende*, 2002. pp.75ff.
20 Col 3:11. Recognition of the equality of slaves as free before God was politically explosive. Paul and the early Christian community were careful, however, and did not extend religious equality into the social and economic spheres. 'Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called. Were you a slave when called? Do not be concerned about it' (1 Cor 7:20f.). See also the Letter to Philemon.
21 Acts 15:1–29. Fischer, however, dates the Apostolic Council earlier than the conflict between Paul and Peter, locating it 'in the winter of 43/44 at the latest'. Fischer, Karl Martin: *Das Urchristentum*, 1985. p.41.
22 They are: the forbidding of eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols, blood and animals that had been strangled, and the acceptance of Jewish marriage law. Acts 15:29. These four laws belong among the seven pre-Mosaic laws that applied to all people. The three others of monotheism, reproduction and the interdiction of killing are taken for granted and not repeated.
23 Kindi, al.: Risalat..., ninth century/1994. p.228.
24 Mar Odisho Metropolitan: Usul ad-Din, fourteenth century/1994. pp.297f.
25 Acts 21:27–37.
26 Fischer, Karl Martin: *Das Urchristentum*, 1985. pp.126, 134. It is important to distinguish between, first, James, the Lord's brother, the first leader of the Christian community of Jerusalem; second, James the elder, son of Zebedee and brother of John; and, third, James the younger.
27 Crété, Liliane: Rupture entre judéo-chrétiens et juifs au I. siècle, 2003. p.23. See also: Desreumaux, Alain: *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus*, 1993. p.88.
28 Thiede, Carsten Peter and d'Ancona, Matthew: *Der Jesus-Papyrus*, 1996. p.80f.
29 See pp.34ff.
30 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Jalons pour une Histoire de l'Église en Iraq*, 1970. pp.33f. This legend lives on to this day in Iran. The Three Kings are said to have founded the Church of the Holy Mother of God in Urmiah while on their return journey from Bethlehem, and, as Marco Polo reported, to be buried in Saveh (located about 120 kilometres south-west of Teheran). Marco Polo further related the Nestorian legend according to which the fire cult of the Zoroastrians was of Christian origin. The infant Jesus gave the kings a stone, which they, in their ignorance, threw into a well, whereupon fire fell from heaven into the well. The kings worshipped it and spread it in their homeland. Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926, Vol.I. pp.78–82.
31 Acts 2:9–11.
32 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Jalons pour une Histoire de l'Église en Iraq*, 1970. p.35f.

33 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Mossoul Chrétienne*, 1959. p. 11. *Jalons pour une Histoire de l'Église en Iraq*, 1970. p. 36.
34 Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. p. 109.
35 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 33.
36 Hennecke, Edgar: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 1959. Vol. 2, p.309. The Thomas Christians of Kerala in South India also claim him as their apostle.
37 Cureton, William: *Ancient Syriac Documents*, 1967. pp. 33–35.
38 Matt 28:19f.
39 Cureton, William: *Ancient Syriac Documents*, 1967. pp. 33–35.
40 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 5, p. 358.
41 Baumer, Christoph: *Die Südliche Seidenstrasse: Inseln im Sandmeer*, 2002. p.10. See also here p. 26.
42 For the text of Eusebius, see: Cureton, William: *Ancient Syriac Documents*, 1967. pp. 1–5, and Hennecke, Edgar: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 1959. Vol. 1, pp. 325f. For the Doctrine of Addai, see Cureton, William: *Ancient Syriac Documents*, 1967. pp. 6–23, and Desreumaux Alain: *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus*, 1993.
43 In the 'year 343 of the Greeks'. In the Syrian cultural sphere, the Seleucian calendar was used until the Middle Ages. It reckoned dates from 1 October 312 BC and is still used in the ecclesiastical literature of the Nestorian and Jacobite Churches. (A few earlier authors began the calendar with 313 or 311 BC.) Our division of world history into periods before and after Christ was accepted around the tenth century and is based on approximate calculations made by the Roman abbot Dionysius Exiguus in 525.
44 Desreumaux, Alain: *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus*, 1993. pp.56–59. In the earliest texts the Mandylion is described as a painting as of the sixth century as an imprint left by Jesus Christ himself on a piece of cloth. It's different from the cloth of Veronica. Brock, Sebastian: Transform-ations of the Edessa Portrait of Christ, 2004. pp.45ff.
45 Döpmann, Hans-Dieter: *Die Ostkirchen vom Bilderstreit bis zur Kirchenspaltung von 1054. Kirchengeshichte in Einzeldarstellungen*, 1991. pp. 38, 52. Leroy, Jules: *Les Manuscripts Syriaques à Peintures conservés dans les Bibliothèques d'Europe et d'Orient*, 1964. Vol. 1, pp. 39f.
46 The identity of Mar Addai with Thaddeus, as well as his historicity, are disputed. See, among others: Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. p. 17f. Desreumaux, Alain: *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus*, 1993. pp. 22ff, 37. Drijvers, H.J.W.: Addai und Mani: Christentum und Manichäismus im dritten Jahrundert in Syrien, 1983. p. 174. Segal, J.B.: *Edessa: The Blessed City*, 1970. pp. 65f.
47 Desreumaux, Alain: *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus*, 1993. pp. 85–87. This second argument, stemming from Psalm 115, as well as the observation that a creature may not worship another creature, was used by many Nestorian missionaries and martyrs. See: Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. pp. 28ff, 42, 71f, 174.
48 Desreumaux, Alain: *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus*, 1993. p. 16. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992, p. 58.
49 Hopkins, Clark: *The Discovery of Dura-Europos*, 1979. pp. 93ff.
50 The Christian historian Sextus Julius Africanus, who visited Edessa in 195, made a similar report. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 58–59.
51 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 35. Griffith, Sidney H.: Christianity in Edessa and the Syriac-speaking world: Mani, Bar Daysan and Ephraem; the struggle for allegiance on the Aramaean frontier, 2002. pp. 10f.
52 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 46f. Segal J.B.: *Edessa: The Blessed City*, 1970. p. 50.
53 Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. p. 18.
54 Desreumaux, Alain: *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus*, 1993. p. 16. Drijvers H.J.W.: Addai und Mani, 1983. pp. 172, 184f.
55 It should be mentioned that the oldest extant Syrian manuscript, from the year 411, likewise originated in Edessa. Leroy, Jules: *Les Manuscripts Syriaques à Peintures conservés dans les Bibliothèques d'Europe et d'Orient*, 1964, vol. 1. p. 106.
56 Brock, Sebastian et al.: *The Hidden Pearl*, 2001. Vol. 1, pp. 38f. In a recent paper, F. Briquel Chatonnet postulated the hypothesis that there existed from the outset two parallel script types in the kingdom of Edessa: a formal Edessian script, the ancestor of Estrangela, and a cursive script, the ancestor of Serto. Briquel Chatonnet, F.: Some reflections about the origin of the serto script, 2005. pp. 173–177.
57 Haarmann, Harald: *Universalgeschichte der Schrift*, 1991. pp. 299–304, 505–516. While Estrangela, which has 22 consonants, features no vowels, Nestorian employs a system of points to indicate vowels, and Serto uses Greek vowels placed above and below the consonants.
58 A table offering a good overview of the various types of script is found in: Mérigoux, Jean-Marie: *Va à Ninive! Un dialogue avec l'Iraq*, 2000. p 253. Nine additional languages were written with the Syrian script. See: Brock, Sebastian et al.: *The Hidden Pearl*, 2001. Vol. 1, pp. 39f, Vol. 2, pp. 261f.
59 The Mandeans, a small Baptist sect of Iraq, also still use an Aramaic dialect, whose unique alphabet writes out all vowels. See: Poizat, Bruno: *Les dialectes morts et vivants de l'araméen*, c. 2002. p.3.
60 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Jalons pour une Histoire de l'Église en Iraq*, 1970. p. 45. Stewart, John: *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise: The Short Story of a Church on Fire*, 1928. p. 156.
61 This test is derived from that of the three young men in the fiery furnace of King Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 3).
62 Jullien, Christelle and Jullien, Florence (eds): *Les Actes de Mar Mari: L'apôtre de la Mésopotamie*, 1993. pp. 63–124.
63 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Jalons pour une Histoire de l'Église en Iraq*, 1970. pp. 41–44.
64 *Chronique de l'Église d'Adiabène sous les Parthes et les Sassanides par Msiha-Zekha*, 1907. pp. 112f, 122f. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. pp. 120–123.
65 On this topic, see: Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler Dietmar, W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. p. 25. Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Jalons pour une Histoire de l'Église en Iraq*, 1970. pp. 67ff. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. pp. 121, 132 n. 12, 163. The following authors, however, maintain the hierarchical dependence of Seleucia-Ctesiphon on Antioch: Grillmeier, Alois: *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche* II/3, 2002. p. 181. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 23. Selb, Walter: Die Geschichte des Kirchenrechts der Nestorianer (von den Anfängen bis zur Mongolenzeit), 1981.
66 The chronicle was discovered and edited by Alphonse Mingana in 1907; its authenticity is doubted by a few historians. See: Brock, Sebastian et al.: *The Hidden Pearl*, 2001. Vol. 3, p. 191. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 88, n. 91.
67 *Chronique de l'Église d'Adiabène sous les Parthes et les Sassanides*, 1907. p. 77f.
68 Hopkins, Clark: *The Discovery of Dura-Europos*, 1979. pp. 146–149 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 33. Segal, J.B.: *Edessa: The Blessed City*, 1970. pp. 24, 41f.
69 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. pp. 74f.
70 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Nisibe*, 1977. pp. 19f.
71 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Nisibe*, 1977. pp. 12f, 30, 71f, 76f, 130.
72 On the topic of the Monastery of Noah's Ark, see: Bell, Gertrude L.: *Amurath to Amurath*, 1911. pp. 290ff. Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 1965. Vol. 2, p. 750. *Nisibe*, 1977. p. 221. Guyer, S.: *Meine Tigrisfahrt*, 1923. p. 149, 154. Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. 1, pp. CXVIIf; Vol. 2, p. 628. Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, 1958. Vol. I, p. 305.
73 On Nestorian monasticicm, see pp. 113ff. For a detailed discussion of the monasteries of Tur Abdin, see: Bell, Gertrude L.: *Amurath to Amurath*, 1911. pp. 301–326. Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Nisibe*, 1977. pp. 124–160. Hollerweger, Hans: *Tur Abdin*, 1999.
74 Brock, Sebastian: *Syriac Perspectives on Late Antiquity*. 1984. ch. XV, p. 2 with n. 8.
75 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Nisbe*, 1977. p. 24. On Ephrem the Syrian, see: Klein, Wassilios: *Syrische Kirchenväter* (ed.), 2004. pp. 36–57.
76 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 1968. Vol. 3, p. 266.
77 *Chronique de Séert*, Part I, vol. 1, 1993. p. 236. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 159.
78 Baum, Wilhelm: *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes*, 1999. p. 38. Baum, Wilhelm, Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. pp. 14, 45. Bowman, John: The Christian monastery on the island of Kharg, 1974–75. pp. 49–64. Meinardus, Otto: *Eine nestorianische Klosteranlage auf der Insel Kharg*, 1986. pp. 38ff.
79 See pp. 68ff.
80 The term 'Melkites' is derived from the Syriac word 'malka' or the Arabic 'malik', meaning 'king'. At that time, adherents of the Christological formula promulgated by the Council of Chalcedon in 451 were called Melkites. Today the word 'Melkites' refers to Greek Catholics with their see in Damascus. These numbers originate within the traditional expansion of Iran and omit the short-lived conquest of the Byzantine Middle East by Chosrau II in 614–624.

81 Hennecke, Edgar: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 1959. Vol. 2, p. 309.
82 Hennecke, Edgar: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 1959. Vol. 2, pp. 315–319.
83 See p. 320. Agur, C.M.: *Church History of Travancore*, 1990. pp.7–10. An alternative tradition presents Bartholomew as the apostle of India. See: Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. p. 51f.
84 Baumer, Christoph: *Die Südliche Seidenstrasse: Inseln im Sandmeer*, 2002. p. 10. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. pp. 155–159. Menachery, George and Chakkalakkal, Werner: *Kodungallur: The Cradle of Christianity in India*, 2000. pp. 1–52.
85 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. pp. 158f, 165f.
86 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. pp. 101, 266.
87 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. pp. 167, 267f. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. pp. 101, 266.
88 Graf, Georg: *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur.* 1944, vol. I. p. 21. Ryckmanns, Jean: Le Christianisme en Arabie du Sud préislamique, 1964. pp. 418f.
89 Agur, C.M.: *Church History of Travancore*, 1990. pp. 12, 14, 29f. Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. p. 52. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. pp. 167–169. Mingana, A.: The Early Spread of Christianity in India, 1926. pp. 43ff.
90 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 268.
91 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. pp. 168f. Madathil, John Oommen: *Kosmas der Indienfahrer*, 1992. pp. 15, 35, 64, 77, 86.
92 Mingana, A.: The Early Spread of Christianity in India, 1926. pp. 31f. Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. 2, pp. 153–161. Gillman Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 171.
93 Wald, Peter: *Der Jemen*, 1992. pp. 290–292. On the significance of Socotra for maritime trade, see: Dridi, Hédi: Indiens et Proche-Orientaux dans une grotte de Suqutra (Yémen), 2002. pp. 565–569, 593–596.
94 Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler Dietmar W.: *The Church of the East*, 2003. p. 58.
95 Personal observations of the author.
96 Both translations are taken from Mingana, A.: The Early Spread of Christianity in India, 1926. pp. 73f.
97 Bibliographic references to the copper plates are in places unclear and contradictory. See: Agur, C.M.: *Church History of Travancore*, 1990. pp. 30f, 1189f. Compare also: Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. pp. 53f. and *The Church of the East*, 2003. pp. 55f. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 169. Mingana, A.: The Early Spread of Christianity in India, 1926. pp. 75f. Pothan, S.G.: *The Syrian Christians of Kerala*, 1963. pp. 32–36, 102–105; plates I–X.
98 Rao, Gopinatha T. A.: Three Inscriptions of Sthanu Ravi, 1916. pp.63f, 70–76. Mingana, A.: The Early Spread of Christianity in India, 1926. pp.45, 66, 75f. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p.170.

Notes to Chapter III

1 Within the bounds of our topic, we will consider the clarification of the fundamental doctrinal questions closed in the West with the creed of the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and in the East with the synodal 'Nestorian' creeds of 486, 585 and 612. The later theological disputes either simply represent shifts in accent or were, like the condemnation of the *Three Chapters*, politically motivated.
2 The term 'Trinity' does not appear in the Bible. It is suggested in the following passages: Matt 28:19; 2 Cor 13:13; 1 Pet 1:2. Although the pantheons of Syria and Egypt at that time contained several triads, made up of a distant paternal god, a maternal goddess and an active son god, who stood close to humanity, they were unfamiliar with the concept of 'three in one'. Abdul Massih Saadi showed that the Gospels already contain four different Christological approaches. Saadi, Abdul Massih: Christological Contention and Tolerance in the Syriac Church Traditions: A Case for Ecumenism, 1998. pp. 47–57.
3 For this reason, Donatism, for example, which made the effectiveness of a sacrament dependent on the human integrity of the priest who celebrated it, is not mentioned.
4 Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34.
5 See pp. 50f.
6 Thümmel, Hans Georg: *Die Kirche des Ostens im 3. und 4. Jahrhundert*, 1988. p. 56.
7 Thümmel, Hans Georg: *Die Kirche des Ostens im 3. und 4. Jahrhundert*, 1988. p. 54.
8 Thümmel, Hans Georg: *Die Kirche des Ostens im 3. und 4. Jahrhundert*, 1988. p. 37.
9 Madathil, John Oommen: *Kosmas der Indienfahrer*, 1992. p. 149.
10 Haendler, Gert: *Die abendländische Kirche im Zeitalter der Völkerwanderung.* 1995. p. 31.
11 Bowker, John (ed.): *Das Oxford-Lexikon der Weltreligionen*, 1999. p. 254.
12 McGuckin, J.A.: Nestorius and the political factions of fifth-century Byzantium: Factors in his personal downfall, 1996. p. 9.
13 Haendler, Gert.: *Von Tertullian bis zu Ambrosius: Die Kirche in Abendland vom Ende des 2. biz zum Ende des 4. Jahrhunderts*, 1992. p. 41. Tertullian likewise anticipated the famous concept of the 'filoque' when he wrote 'The third is namely the Spirit, which is derived from the Father and the Son'. Ditto p. 40.
14 Matt 14:17; Mark 2:22; Luke 5:37.
15 Tardieu, Michel: Marcion, la rupture radicale, p.44, 2003.
16 Tröger, Karl-Wolfgang: *Das Christentum im zweiten Jahrhundert*, 1988. p. 123.
17 Hennecke, Edgar: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 1959. Vol. 1, pp. 11–14, 258f. Zeller, Dieter (ed.): *Christentum I*, 2002. pp. 291ff.
18 Hopkins, Clark: *The Discovery of Dura-Europos*, 1979. pp. 93, 106–109.
19 See pp. 56f.
20 Vööbus, Arthur: *Early versions of the New Testament*, 1954. p. 17.
21 See pp. 111f.
22 Winter, Franz: *Bardasanes von Edessa über Indien*, 1999. p. 33.
23 Kawerau, Peter: *Das Christentum des Ostens*, 1972. p. 35.
24 Kawerau, Peter: *Das Christentum des Ostens*, 1972. p. 35.
25 Hennecke, Edgar: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen.* 1959. Vol. 1, p. 260.
26 Klein, Wassilios: *Grosse Religionsstifter: Mani*, 1992. p. 75.
27 Teixidor, Javier: Bardesane d'Édesse, philosophe stoïcien, 2003. p. 41.
28 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 44. In Syriac, as in other Semitic languages, the word for 'spirit' is, in its original sense as 'wind' or 'breath', feminine. In reference to the Third Person of the Trinity, the term adopts the masculine gender.
29 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 53. *Odes de Salomon*, 1911. Ode XIX, p. 20. Hennecke, Edgar: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 1959. Vol. 2, pp. 599f. On Aphrahat: Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. pp. 33f.
30 Plato: Phaidon, 1972. pp. 28, 30, 50, 52. Politeia, 1972. pp. 224ff.
31 Tröger, Karl-Wolfgang: *Das Christentum im zweiten Jahrhundert*, 1988. p. 73. Gnosticism also produced such peculiar offshoots as the Ophites, who worshipped serpents. They believed that the serpent in Paradise wanted to help the humans free themselves from the evil Creator God. See: Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 64.
32 Madathil, John Oommen: *Kosmas der Indienfahrer*, 1992. pp. 150f. Thümmel, Hans Georg: *Die Kirche des Ostens im 3. und 4. Jahrhundert*, 1988. pp. 89f. Winkelmann, Friedhelm: *Die östlichen Kirchen in der Epoche der christologischen Auseinandersetzungen*, 1994. pp. 31f.
33 See pp. 40ff.
34 Winkelmann, Friedhelm: *Die östlichen Kirchen in der Epoche der christologischen Auseinandersetzungen*, 1994. pp. 94f, 118.
35 Winkelmann, Friedhelm: *Die östlichen Kirchen in der Epoche der christologischen Auseinandersetzungen*, 1994. pp. 83, 94.
36 Klein, Wassilios: *Syrische Kirchenväter* (ed.), 2004. p. 18.
37 Emperor Constantine accepted baptism only on his deathbed in order not to sin after baptism any more.
38 Thümmel, Hans Georg: *Die Kirche des Ostens im 3. und 4. Jahrhundert*, 1988. pp. 43ff, 62f, 80–84, 86f.
39 Haendler, Gert: *Von Tertullian bis zu Ambrosius*, 1992. p. 85.
40 Winkelmann, Friedhelm: *Die östlichen Kirchen in der Epoche der christologischen Auseinandersetzungen*, 1994. p. 73.
41 Haendler, Gert: *Von Tertullian bis zu Ambrosius*, 1992. p. 113.
42 *Lexikon der Kirchengeschichte*, 2001. Vol. 2, col. 1279.
43 Thümmel, Hans Georg: *Die Kirche des Ostens im 3. und 4. Jahrhundert*, 1988. p. 51.
44 Baumer, Christoph and Weber, Therese: *Eastern Tibet*, 2005 pp. 61f.
45 See pp. 66ff.
46 Nestorius: *Le Livre d'Héraclide de Damas*, 1910.

pp. 136, 154. See also: Mar Bawai Soro: *Does Ephesus unite or divide?*, 1996. p. 4.
47 The word 'mono-physite' implies that Christ had a single, simple nature, the term 'mia-physite', however, a single but composite nature.
48 Fanous, Andrew: *Christology between Chalcedonian and the non-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches*, 2002. pp. 2f.
49 Grillmeier, Alois: *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, 2002. p. 233.
50 Vorgrimler, Herbert: *Neues Theologisches Wörterbuch*, 2000. p. 426.
51 Grillmeier, Alois: *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, 2002. p. 241.
52 Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. pp. 106f.
53 Thümmel, Hans Georg: *Die Kirche des Ostens im 3. und 4. Jahrhundert*, 1988. p. 65.
54 Grillmeier, Alois: *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, 2002. p. 242.
55 Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. p. 104.
56 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak: Attitudes Nestoriennes vis-á-vis de l'Islam,* 1994. pp. 196, 205. On the question of the dating of the Book of the Tower, see: chapt. I, note 10.
57 Grillmeier, Alois: *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, 2002. p. 243
58 See pp. 111ff.
59 The original Antiochene position regarding the problem of sin will be discussed pp. 113ff.
60 Grillmeier, Alois: *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, 2002. p. 244.
61 Regarding the biography of Nestorius, see also: Nestorius: *Le Livre d'Héraclide de Damas,* 1910. Letter to Cosmas, fifth/seventh centuries, in: Nau, François: *Textes Syriaques édités et traduits par F. Nau*, 1993. Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. Loofs, Friedrich: *Nestorius and His Place in the History of Christian Doctrine.* 1914. Mar Bawai Soro: *Nestorius and the Nestorian Church*, 1994. *The Person and Teachings of Nestorius of Constantinople with a special Reference to his Condemnation at the Council of Ephesus*, 1997.
62 Nestorius: *Le Livre d'Héraclide de Damas*, 1910. pp. 91f.
63 On the topic of Oriental mother goddesses, see Villeneuve, Estelle: L'héritage des déesses-mères?, 2003. pp. 40–47.
64 Loofs, Friedrich: *Nestorius and His Place in the History of Christian Doctrine*, 1914. pp. 31f.
65 Noja, Sergio (ed.): *L'Arabie avant l'Islam*, 1994. p. 201.
66 Hennecke, Edgar: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 1959. Vol. 1, p. 108.
67 Such triads were, for instance, Isis, Osiris, Horus in Egypt and Ishtar, Sin, Shamash in Babylonia. See: Bauschke, Martin: *Jesus im Koran*, 2001. pp. 76ff, 196ff. The Monatanists were a Christian movement of ecstatic prophecy, which permitted women to hold clerical office. Vorgrimler, Herbert: *Neues Theologisches Wörterbuch*, 2000. p. 429.
68 Madathil, John Oommen: *Kosmas der Indienfahrer*, 1992. p. 53.
69 Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. pp. 41f.
70 On the terminology, see, among others: Mar Bawai Soro: *Nestorius and the Nestorian Church*, 1994. *Is the Theology of the Church of the East Nestorian?*, 1994. pp. 10ff. *Does Ephesus unite or divide?*, 1996. pp. 6f. *The Person and Teachings of Nestorius of Constantinople with a special Reference to his Condemnation at the Council of Ephesus*, 1997. pp. 12ff, 16. Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. pp. 36, 82ff. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 46.
71 *Ephesus, the Council of.* Edited by N.P. Tanner, no date. p. 3
72 Nestorius: *Le Livre d'Héraclide de Damas*, 1910. pp. 77–81. Sliva de Mansourya: Hymne sur les Docteurs Grecs, 1993. p. 311. Loofs, Friedrich: *Nestorius and His Place in the History of Christian Doctrine*, 1914. pp. 67–70. 80.
73 Nestorius: *Le Livre d'Héraclide de Damas*, 1910. pp. 261f.
74 Mar Babai the Great: *Hymns of Praise.* sixth/seventh century. p. 1. Madathil, John Oommen: *Kosmas der Indienfahrer*, 1992. p. 57.
75 *Ephesus, the Council of.* Edited by N.P. Tanner, no date. p. 3.
76 Madathil, John Oommen: *Kosmas der Indienfahrer*, 1992. p. 24.
77 *Ephesus, the Council of.* Edited by N.P. Tanner, no date. p. 5.
78 Sliva de Mansourya: Hymne sur les Docteurs Grecs, 1993. pp. 299f.
79 Loofs, Friedrich: *Nestorius and His Place in the History of Christian Doctrine*, 1914. p. 42. On the doctrine of Pelagius, see pp. 118f
80 Winkelmann, Friedhelm: *Die östlichen Kirchen in der Epoche der christologischen Auseinandersetzungen*, 1994. pp. 42f.
81 Interestingly, the Theotokos question played hardly any role in the accusations against Nestorius.
82 Madathil, John Oommen: *Kosmas der Indienfahrer*, 1992. p. 25.
83 Letter to Cosmas, 1993. p. 276.
84 Nestorius: *Le Livre d'Héraclide de Damas*, 1910. p. 289.
85 Nestorius: *Le Livre d'Héraclide de Damas*, 1910. p. 330.
86 Kotchannes lies in the far south-east of modern Turkey.
87 Nestorius: *Le Livre d'Héraclide de Damas*, 1910. p. 331.
88 See, for instance: Nestorius: *Le Livre d'Héraclide de Damas*, 1910. pp. 12, 33f, 35, 50–58, 188ff. See also: Loofs, Friedrich: *Nestorius and His Place in the History of Christian Doctrine*, 1914. p. 100. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. pp. 176f. Theodore of Mopsuestia also emphasized that the union of the divine with the human nature occurred not at the baptism of Jesus but at the Annunciation. See: Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. p. 249.
89 See the following chapter, section 1, for the loss of Christian unity at the Council of Chalcedon.
90 Nestorius: *Le Livre d'Héraclide de Damas*, 1910. p. 298. Also pp. 316, 327, 330. Nestorius also praised Leo's position without reservation in a letter to the people of Constantinople. op. cit. pp. 370–374.
91 Nestorius: *Le Livre d'Héraclide de Damas*, 1910. p. IX.
92 It becomes clear from the tract 'The Christological Heretics' by Bar Hebraeus that the doctrine of Nestorius was not generally condemned as heretical. Bar Hebraeus (1228–1286) served beginning in 1264 as Jacobite Maphrian of the East; all the Jacobite dioceses of Asia were under his jurisdiction. His Miaphysite Christology contrasted with the Nestorian. In his tract Bar Hebraeus listed 30 different heretics, but Nestorius is conspicuously absent, since the Nestorians, 'like other sects, think correctly about the Trinity and the preservation of the nature of which Christ consists'. See: Bar Hebräus: *Les hérésies christologiques.* p. 264.
93 Winkelmann, Friedhelm: *Die östlichen Kirchen in der Epoche der christologischen Auseinandersetzungen*, 1994. p. 42.
94 Winkelmann, Friedhelm: *Die östlichen Kirchen in der Epoche der christologischen Auseinandersetzungen*, 1994. p. 43.

Notes to Chapter IV

1 Winkelmann, Friedhelm: *Die östlichen Kirchen in der Epoche der christologischen Auseinandersetzungen*, 1994. pp. 44, 82.
2 Winkelmann, Friedhelm: *Die östlichen Kirchen in der Epoche der christologischen Auseinandersetzungen*, 1994. p. 83.
3 Winkelmann, Friedhelm: *Die östlichen Kirchen in der Epoche der christologischen Auseinandersetzungen*, 1994. p. 48.
4 As has already been mentioned, the difference between the Byzantine and Antiochene formulas stemmed above all from the fact that the former understood the term 'hypostasis' as an individual, the latter understood it as a set of qualities. Brock, Sebastian et al.: *The Hidden Pearl*, 2001. Vol. 1, pp. 26ff.
5 Klein, Wassilios: *Syrische Kirchenväter* (ed.), 2004. p. 26.
6 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 191.
7 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 191.
8 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 192.
9 Conversation with the author on 2 June 2001.
10 Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. p. 8.
11 After the split of the Latin Church from the Byzantine Church in 1054 the term most often designated Christians of the Byzantine rite.
12 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 190
13 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Jalons pour une Histoire de l'Église en Iraq*, 1970. p. 127.
14 See pp. 82ff.
15 The Syrian Orthodox Church rejects not only the term 'Monophysite' but also the designation 'Jacobite', since it might call into question the apostolic roots of the Church.
16 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 219.
17 Winkelmann, Friedhelm: *Die östlichen Kirchen in der Epoche der christologischen Auseinandersetzungen*, 1994. pp. 61, 68.
18 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. pp. 195f.
19 Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. p. 193.

20 The Peshitta Bible is used by all Syrian Churches except the Melkites.
21 The Greek term 'canon' means ruler, criterion or norm.
22 Tröger, Karl-Wolfgang: *Das Christentum im zweiten Jahrhundert*, 1988. pp.85f. Vööbus, Arthur: *Early versions of the New Testament*, 1954. pp.63f.
23 Vorgrimmler, Herbert: *Neues Theologisches Wörterbuch*, 2000. p. 336.
24 Kawerau, Peter: *Das Christentum des Ostens*, 1972. p. 20. Vööbus, Arthur: *Early versions of the New Testament*, 1954. p. 70.
25 Hennecke, Edgar: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 1959. pp. 104–107.
26 It's represented by the so-called Codex Syriacus Sinaiticus from the fourth century and the Codex Syrus Curetonianus from the fifth century. See: Kawerau, Peter: *Das Christentum des Ostens*, 1972. p. 21. Vööbus, Arthur: *Early versions of the New Testament*, 1954. pp. 73f, 76, 82f, 85f.
27 Brock, Sebastian et al: *The Hidden Pearl*: 2001. Vol. 3, pp. 221–235; and two letters to the author dated 29 October and 8 November 2005. Kawerau, Peter: *Das Christentum des Ostens*, 1972. p.21. Vööbus, Arthur: *Early versions of the New Testament*, 1954. pp.96ff. There is still no text critical edition, but one is being prepared by the Peshitta Commission of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament.
28 Berasategui, Placide: Les versions de la Bible en usage dans les églises de langue syriaque, 1956. pp. 59f. Vööbus, Arthur: *Early versions of the New Testament*, 1954. pp. 103–121.

Notes to Chapter V

1 See p. 19.
2 While the scholarship prior to c. 1980 accepted a date around the seventh century BCE, now an earlier date of about the twelfth century BCE is given.
3 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. pp. 17, 76, 91, 106–109, 116.
4 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 116.
5 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 76. *Chronique de Séert*, Part I, vol. 1, 1993. pp. 237ff.
6 Presumably the first judgement judged the spirit of the deceased, as the body remained on the earth, and the second judgement the body. See: Bowker, John (ed.): *Das Oxford-Lexikon der Weltreligionen*, 1999. p. 318.
7 Isaiah 45:7.
8 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 244f.
9 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1998. Vol. 21, p. 953.
10 Haarmann, Harald: *Universalgeschichte der Schrift*, 1991. pp. 332ff.
11 Yasna 30, 3.
12 Yasna 30, 4.
13 This sympathy towards Christianity was expressed at first at the beginning of the rule of the following kings: Vahram II (ruled 276–293), Yazdgerd I (ruled 399–420), Piroz I (ruled 459–484), Kavad I (ruled 488–496, 499–531), Hormizd IV (ruled 579–590) and Chosrau II (ruled 590–628).
14 Chaumont, Marie-Louise: L'Inscription de Kartir à la «Ka'bah de Zoroastre», 1960. p. 339f. Skjaervo, P.O.: Counter-Manichaean elements in Kerdir's inscriptions, 1997. p. 313f.
15 Rist, Josef: Die Verfolgungen der Christen im spätantiken Sassanidenreich: Ursachen, Verlauf und Folgen, 1996. p. 25.
16 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1998. Vol. 6, p. 752.
17 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 27.
18 Regarding Kartir's biography, see, among others: Chaumont, Marie-Louise: L'Inscription de Kartir à la «Ka'bah de Zoroastre», 1960. pp. 339–380. Skjaervo, P.O.: Counter-Manichaean elements in Kerdir's inscriptions, 1997. pp. 313–342.
19 Chaumont, Marie-Louise: L'Inscription de Kartir à la «Ka'bah de Zoroastre», 1960. p. 347.
20 Chaumont, Marie-Louise: L'Inscription de Kartir à la «Ka'bah de Zoroastre», 1960. p. 348.
21 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 1, 1950. p. 158f. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 222f.
22 Skjaervo, P.O.: Counter-Manichaean elements in Kerdir's inscriptions, 1997. p. 318.
23 See pp. 113ff
24 *Chronique de Séert*, Part I, vol. 1, 1993. p. 238. Rist, Josef: Die Verfolgungen der Christen im spätantiken Sassanidenreich, 1996. p. 28f.
25 Mk 8:34–35. See also Mt 5:10–12, Pr. 1: 4,19; 2: 20–25; 4, 1–2.
26 Hage, Wolfgang: *Untersuchungen zum Leben der Christen Zentralasiens im Mittelalter*, 1970. p. 13. Regarding East Syrian Church organization, see also pp. 76ff.
27 Ashbrook-Harvey, Susan: Women in Syriac Christian tradition, 2003, p. 46.
28 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Jalons pour une Histoire de l'Église en Iraq*, 1970. pp. 66–75.
29 *Chronique de l'Église d'Adiabène sous les Parthes et les Sassanides*, 1907. p. 111.
30 *Chronique de l'Église d'Adiabène sous les Parthes et les Sassanides*, 1907. p. 111.
31 *Chronique de l'Église d'Adiabène sous les Parthes et les Sassanides*, 1907. pp. 121–123. Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. pp. 20–24.
32 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodocon Orientale*, 1975. pp. 50ff.
33 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 138.
34 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 8f.
35 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 26.
36 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 27.
37 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 263.
38 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. pp. 28–57. Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. p. 41, 65.
39 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. pp. 89–92. See also: *Chronique de Séert*, Part I, vol. 1, 1993. p. 297. Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. pp. 58, 69. Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. p. 68. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 141.
40 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 84f.
41 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 85.
42 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. pp. 93–96, 100–104. *Chronique de Séert*, Part I, vol. 1, 1993. p. 309. Vol. 2, 1950. pp. 221–224. Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. p. 72f.
43 Bishops Tomarsa (in office 363–371) and Qayyuma (in office 377–399), included in the lists of patriarchs, are disputed; presumably their names are later fictions intended to maintain the line of succession. See Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. XIII. Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. 1, 1958. pp. 259–261.
44 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 183.
45 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. pp. 153, 175–178. Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. pp. 61, 100.
46 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. pp. 129, 135f.
47 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 182. Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. p. 70.
48 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. pp. 85, 117. Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. 1, 1958. p. 152f.
49 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 99.
50 Dauvillier, Jean: Les Provinces Chaldéennes «de l'Extérieur» au Moyen Age, 1948. p. 278.
51 Esbroeck, Michel van: Caucasian Parallels to China Cross Representations, 2003. p. 5.
52 Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. p. 81. *Chronique de Séert*, Part I, vol. 1, 1993. p. 305.
53 *Chronique de Séert*, Part I, vol. 2, 1993. pp. 253–257. Concerning the excavations, refer to: Dreswanskaya, G.A.: *Ovalnij dom christianskoj ovschini v starom Merve*, 1974. pp. 26–33. Pugachenkova, G.A.: *Puti razvitiya architektury juznogo Turkmenistana pory rabovladeniya i feodalisma*, 1958. pp. 125–131. Usmanova, S.I.: Kristianskjie pamatniki Turkmenii, 1994. pp. 26–33.
54 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodocon Orientale*, 1975. p. 8
55 *Chronique de Séert*, Part I, vol. 2, 1993. pp. 328ff. Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. pp. 139–178. Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. pp. 104–118.
56 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 164.
57 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 163.
58 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. pp. 179–187. Rist, Josef: Die Verfolgungen der Christen im spätantiken Sassanidenreich, 1996. pp. 34ff.
59 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 182f.
60 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. pp. 8–35. Since Maruta also signed the conciliar protocol, the signatures of four bishops mentioned as present are, in fact, missing, and, on the other hand, a diocese was represented twice; the synod is correctly called the 'council of the forty bishops'.

61 Like all the orthodox Churches of the East, the Church of the East maintains the original formulation of the creed of Nicea-Constantinople of 381. It rejects the addition made in the late sixth century and authorized by the pope in 1014 of the filioque, according to which the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son. See Badger, George Percy: *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 1987. Vol. 2, p. 92. Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. pp. X, 37.

62 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 14. The root of the title 'catholicos' is unclear. Perhaps it was borrowed from Roman statecraft, in which catholicos referred to the finance minister of a group of provinces, or it is related to the Greek word for 'universal'. Whether the characterization of the leader of the Church as 'catholicos' was used for the first time in 410 is unknown. In any case, the double title of patriarch-catholicos has been used since the end of the fifth century.

63 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. pp. 125ff. Dauvillier, Jean: Les Provinces Chaldéennes «de l'Extérieur» au Moyen Age, 1948. p. 268f. Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. pp. 186f, 331f.

64 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 71.

65 Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. I, p. CXXXII. Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. pp. 135, 148f.

66 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 88. *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 1, 1993. p. 129.

67 A typical example is the Swiss Catholic bishop Hans Jörg Vogel of the diocese of Basel, who a few years ago had to resign his office on account of his fathering a child.

68 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 69.

69 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 1, 1993. p. 159.

70 Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. p. 253f. Klein cites the Nestorian Church historian Amr ibn Matta (†1350). The metropolitan sees were different at various times. See also: Dauvillier, Jean: Les Provinces Chaldéennes «de l'Extérieur» au Moyen Age, 1948. pp. 266–314. Mingana, A.: The early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East, 1925. pp. 318–330. Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the year 1500*, 1977. p. 21f. Vine, Aubrey: *The Nestorian Churches*, 1937. pp. 112–137.

71 Dauvillier, Jean: Les Provinces Chaldéennes «de l'Extéreur» au Moyen Age, 1948. p. 292. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 217.

72 Dauvillier, Jean: Les Provinces Chaldéennes «de l'Extéreur» au Moyen Age, 1948. p. 271f.

73 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 57f. Astonishingly, the patriarchate of Antioch seems hardly to have reacted to this declaration of independence.

74 Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. p. 119f.

75 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. pp. 44ff. Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. p. 119f.

76 Klein, Wassilios: *Syrische Kirchenväter* (ed.), 2004. pp. 116, 119.

77 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 67 (shortened).

78 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 68.

79 See pp. 99f.

80 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 90.

81 Grillmeier, Alois: *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, 2002. pp. 266, 273.

82 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Jalons pour une Histoire de l'Église en Iraq*, 1970. p. 126. Grillmeier, Alois: *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, 2002. pp. 262ff.

83 Grillmeier, Alois: *Jesus der Christus im Glauben der Kirche*, 2002. pp. 201ff.

84 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. pp. 505–509, 528, 537.

85 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 197f (shortened).

86 See pp. 156ff.

87 Regarding Gondeshapur, see: Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. pp. 25, 38. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 104f. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1998. Vol. 6, p. 842.

88 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. pp. 498, 502, 525. Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. pp. 211ff.

89 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. p. 537. Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 251f.

90 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. pp. 249–251.

91 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 311.

92 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. p. 538f.

93 Stewart, John: *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise*, 1928. p. 251.

94 The accusation, made by Miaphysite historians and accepted uncritically by Fiey, that Barsauma abused his military authority to carry out massacres against Miaphysites has no historical basis. See Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 1965-1968. pp. 52f, 327f, 628, 765. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 195.

95 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 1, 1950. pp. 99–102.

96 Mingana, A.: The early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East, 1925. p. 303f. A. Naymark thinks that Kavad didn't flee to the Hephtalites but to the northern Caucasus. Naymark, Aleksandr: Sogdiana, its Christians and Byzantium: A study of Artistic and Cultural Connections in late Antiquity and Middle Ages, 2001. p. 292.

97 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 1. 1919. pp. 124–128.

98 Wigram, W.A.: *The Assyrians and their Neighbours*, 1929. pp. 65–68.

99 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 217.

100 Mingana, A.: The early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East, 1925. p. 305. However, this war did not, as Mingana and Gillman/Klimkeit have written, take place in 581, but rather ten years later, when Byzantium helped Chosrau II to retake the throne. Gillman Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 217.

101 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 1, 1919. pp. 135f.

102 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 1, 1919. p. 150.

103 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 99.

104 Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. p. 171.

105 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 133.

106 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 1, 1919. p. 158f.

107 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 1, 1919. pp. 162ff. Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 215f.

108 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 1, 1919. pp. 176–182, 192. Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. pp. 194ff.

109 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 1, 1919. pp. 192ff. Hollerweger, Hans: *Tur Abdin*, 1999. p. 26.

110 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 1, 1919. p. 196. Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. p. 209. Tabari: *Chronique*, 1869. Vol. II, p. 248.

111 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. 438f.

112 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. 439f, 443f, 465f

113 Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. p. 266–284.

114 Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. p. 288f.

115 It is somewhat improbable that Maurice gave Chosrau one of his daughters as a wife, who around 590 would have been at most eight years old. See: Baum, Wilhelm: *Schirin: Christin, Königin, Liebesmythos*, 2003. pp. 33–37.

116 Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. p. 206.

117 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 1968. Vol. III, p. 219.

118 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 1968. Vol. III, pp. 202–225. Two additional late Sassanian Nestorian church ruins were found near Qusair, about 90 kilometres north-west of al-Hira, and another 30 kilometres farther north near Rahaliya. Finster, Barbara and Schmidt, Jürgen: Sasanidische und frühislamische Ruinen im Iraq, 1977. pp. 27–43, tables 14–18.

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120 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. pp. 82ff. Nau, François: *Les Arabes Chrétiens de Mésopotamie et de Syrie du VII au VIII siècle*, 1933. pp. 49–90.

121 Labourt, J.: *Le Christianisme dans l'Empire Perse sous la Dynastie Sassanide*, 1904. p. 206f. Kawerau, Peter: *Das Christentum des Ostens*, 1972. p. 22. Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. p. 317f.

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et al.: *The Hidden Pearl*, 2001. Vol. 1, p. 37, Vol. 2, p. 34. Mandel, Gabriele: *Gemalte Gottesworte: Das arabische Alphabet*, 2004. p. 8. See also: Briquel Chatonnet, F. and Desreumaux, Alain: Le berceau des églises syriaques: les inscriptions de Turquie et de Syrie, 2004. pp. 23ff.

123 Nau, François: *Les Arabes Chrétiens de Mésopotamie et de Syrie du VII au VIII siècle*, 1933. p. 46. Hunter, Erica: *Syriac Inscriptions from al Hira*, 1996. p. 80.

124 Nau, François: *Les Arabes Chrétiens de Mésopotamie et de Syrie du VII au VIII siècle*, 1933. p. 47. *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2. 1919. pp. 539f. Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. pp. 314ff.

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126 Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. p. 289.

127 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. pp. 481–490.

128 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. pp. 522f. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 242.

129 Foss, Clive: The Persians in the Roman Near East. (601–630 AD), 2003. pp. 156. Palmer, Andrew: *Monk and mason on the Tigris frontier*, 1990. pp. 149–153. Segal, J. B.: *Edessa. The blessed city*, 1970. pp. 98.

130 Palmer, Andrew: *Monk and Mason on the Tigris Frontier*, 1990. p. 178.

131 Bar Hebraeus: *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, 1932. p. 87.

132 Foss, Clive: The Persians in the Roman Near East. (601–630 AD), 2003. p. 153.

133 Rashad, Mahmoud: *Iran*, 1998. p. 63.

134 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. p. 551.

135 Tabari: *Chronique*, 1869. Vol. II, pp. 345ff. Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. 1, p. LXVI, vol. 2, pp. 112–115.

136 Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. 2, p. 116.

137 Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. p. 349. Thomas, Bishop of Marga, attributed the delegation to Kavad II, and his translator Budge believed that the True Cross had been returned in 628/629 by Ardashir III. See: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. 2, p. 125f. The *Chronicle of Seert* finally attributes the return of the Cross to Ardashir's murderer, General Sharhbaraz (ruled 629). See Part II, Vol. 2, p. 556.

138 Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. 2, pp. 128–130.

139 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. pp. 558–579.

140 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. p. 627.

141 Menasce, Pierre Jean (ed.): *Skand-Gumanik Vicar: La solution décisive des doutes*, 1945. p. 7.

142 *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 2001. pp. 21, 26. Foster, John: *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty*, 1939. p. 58. Forte, Antonio: The edict of 638 allowing the diffusion of Christianity in China, 1996. p. 364. On the so-called Abraham from Persia, 1996. pp. 403ff.

143 Since Ishoyahb's envoy, the bishop of Maishan, arrived in Medina after the death of Mohammed, he dealt with Mohammed's successor, Abu Bakr. *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2. 1919. pp. 618–624. Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. 2, p. 126.

144 Jesus's life was a model of pacifism. See also Mt. 5:5, 5:21, 26:51ff; Lk. 22:49ff; Joh. 18:10f.

145 Haendler, Gert: *Von Tertullian bis zu Ambrosius*, 1992. p. 85.

146 Jacob bore the nickname 'Baradai', 'the ragged one', because he often dressed as a beggar. Klein, Wassilios: *Syrische Kirchenväter* (ed.), 2004. p. 198.

147 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 1, 1919. pp. 140ff. Klein, Wassilios: *Syrische Kirchenväter* (ed.), 2004. p. 205f. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 246. Nau, François: *Les Arabes Chrétiens de Mésopotamie et de Syrie du VII au VIII siècle*, 1933. pp. 52–56.

148 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 52.

149 Winkelmann, Friedhelm: *Die östlichen Kirchen in der Epoche der christologischen Auseinandersetzungen*, 1994. p. 122.

150 The maphrianate was abolished by a synodal decision in 1859 and reintroduced in 1964 as head of the Syrian Orthodox Church of India. *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. pp. 542ff; Ignatius, Zakka I Iwas: *The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch at a Glance*, 1983. p. 7.

151 Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. I, pp. CXXXI, CLXII–CLXVII. Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 1965. Vol. II, pp. 762–769.

152 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 1965. Vol. II, pp. 565–574.

153 See: Diwersy, Alfred and Wand, Gisela: *Irak*, 2001. pp. 422–424. The mounted figure of the martyr George († c. 303), who defeats evil, symbolized by the dragon, is presumably adopted from a late Egyptian motif. There the mounted god Horus, wearing the armour of a Roman officer, used a lance to pierce a crocodile that represented Seth, the 'evil' murderer of Osiris. See Meyer, Laure: Chevaux et Cavaliers d'Orient, 2003. p. 44.

154 Such incubation rooms are found, for instance, in the following churches: Tur Abdin: Monastery of Mar Malke, Monastery of Mar Aho; Iraq: Monastery of Mar Behnam, Monastery of Mar Giwargis near Mossul, Mar Giwargis Church near Doreeh (Duri); Iran: St Sergius and St Baccus Church near Bos Vatch. See also: Bar Kaldoun: *Histoire du Moine Rabban Youssef Bousnaya*, 1900. pp. 61, 67. Guyer, S.: *Meine Tigrisfahrt*, 1923. p. 182.

Notes to Chapter VI

1 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. pp. 125–129.

2 Baumer, Christoph: *Die Südliche Seidenstrasse*, 2002. p. 34.

3 Winter, Franz: *Bardasanes von Edessa über Indien*, 1999. pp. 115–122.

4 See pp. 60ff.

5 Menasce, Pierre Jean (ed.): *Skand-Gumanik Vicar*, 1945. p. 25.

6 Menasce, Pierre Jean (ed.): *Skand-Gumanik Vicar*, 1945. pp. 215–221.

7 Menasce, Pierre Jean (ed.): *Skand-Gumanik Vicar*, 1945. p. 211. The source of the slandering of Mary is found in the Jewish Toledot Yeshu and is also attributed to the Jews in the Koran (4:156). See Bowker, John (ed.): *Das Oxford-Lexikon der Weltreligionen*, 1999. p. 1012. Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. I, 1867. pp. 540, 543f.

8 Menasce, Pierre Jean (ed.): *Skand-Gumanik Vicar*, 1945. pp. 213–15.

9 Menasce, Pierre Jean (ed.): *Skand-Gumanik Vicar*, 1945. p. 213.

10 Menasce, Pierre Jean (ed.): *Skand-Gumanik Vicar*, 1945. p. 225.

11 See pp. 159ff.

12 Lieu, Samuel N.C.: *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China*, 1998. pp. 180, 186, 193. *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 2001. Vol. I, p. 85f.

13 Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14. Jh*, 2000. p. 82. Lieu, Samuel N.C.: *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, 1992. p. 302f. It is highly improbable that the Paulicians and Bogomils, sometimes connected with the Manichaeans, actually took their inspiration from the Manichaean philosophy. See: Döpmann, Hans-Dieter: *Die Ostkirchen vom Bilderstreit bis zur Kirchenspaltung von 1054*, 1991. pp. 104–107.

14 Klein, Wassilios: *Grosse Religionsstifter: Mani*, 1992. p. 78.

15 John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7: Gardner, Iain: Personal Letters from the Manichaean Community at Kellis, 1997. p. 78. Hoffmann, Andreas: Verfälschung der Jesus-Tradition: Neutestamentliche Texte in der manichäisch-augustinischen Kontroverse, 1997. p. 149f. Klein, Wassilios: War Mani Priester der Perserkirche?, 1997. p. 207.

16 In the Acts of Thomas, Mani also found the rejection of marriage, greed and 'all corporeal pleasures'. See § 28, 108–113, 126. Hennecke, Edgar: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 1959. Vol. II, pp. 307f, 320, 349–358.

17 Haehling, Raban von: Der Manichäismus: Eine Weltreligion zwischen Christentum und Islam, 2003. p. 273. Thümmel, Hans Georg: *Die Kirche des Ostens im 3. und 4. Jahrhundert*, 1988. p. 37. For an introduction to the teachings of Mani, see: Lieu, Samuel N.C.: *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, 1992. The fact that the khagan of the Uigurs accepted Manichaeaism around 762 provides no counter-example to the general unsuitability of this doctrine as a state religion. For the powerful Bögü Khan followed political considerations and understood himself to be the representative and successor of Mani, which elevated him above other rulers. As in the Sassanian Empire, in China Manichaeism was opposed not for theological but rather for political reasons, since it threatened the social order and state. Lieu, Samuel N.C.: *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China*, 1998. pp. 149, 156, 168.

18 Lieu, Samuel N.C.: *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China*, 1998. p. 37f.

19 *Chronique de Séert*, Part I, vol. 1, 1993. p. 227. Klein, Wassilios: War Mani Priester der Perserkirche?, 1997. p. 212.

20 Lieu, Samuel N.C.: *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China*, 1998. pp. 79, 84.

21 Lieu, Samuel N.C.: *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China*, 1998. p. 193.

22 Buddhist influence is evident in Parthian texts. Presumably Mani's disciple Mar Ammo began the 'Buddhisization' of Manichaeism in the late third century. Later Aramaic, Turkish, Sogdian and Uigur hymns call Mani 'the bodhisattva

Maitreya', the 'great Maitreya', the 'Buddha Maitreya', the 'god Buddha', but also 'Jesus virgin of light', 'Jesus vajra', 'true Logos', 'Liberator of the bound, who raises the dead', 'Bar Maryam (Son of Mary)' or 'Mesiha'. See: Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: Jesus' Entry into Parinirvana. Manichaean Identity in Buddhist Central Asia, 2002. pp.246–254. Hutter, Manfred: Mani als Maitreya, 2002. pp.114ff. Hage, Wolfgang: *Untersuchungen zum Leben der Christen Zentralasiens im Mittelalter*, 1970. p.65. In the Chinese context, Mani was also equated with Lao-tzu. Lieu, Samuel N.C.: *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, 1992. pp.257ff.

23 *Chronique de Séert*, Part I, vol. 1, 1993. pp. 226–228. See also: Klein, Wassilios: War Mani Priester der Perserkirche?, 1997. pp. 202–205.

24 Mani wrote in Syriac, Aramaic and Pahlavi, and was reputed to be a gifted painter. The illustrations in the Manichaean manuscripts discovered in Turfan, Xinjiang, in the early twentieth century are of striking quality. It has been said that the literate Manichaean missionaries carried with them a religious picture book. See: Gulácsi, Zsuzsanna: *Manichaean Art in Berlin Collections*, 2001. pp. 4–7. Most of the manuscript fragments found in Turfan were written in a later style of the Syrian script, called Manichaean cursive. See: Haarmann, Harald: *Universalgeschichte der Schrift*, 1991. p. 503.

25 Klein, Wassilios: *Grosse Religionsstifter: Mani*, 1992. p. 75.

26 Sundermann, Werner: Das Leiden und Sterben Jesu in manichäischer Deutung, 2002. pp.214–217. Sundermann believes that Mani supported a Docetism without suffering and that his disciples developed the Docetism with suffering.

27 A few bans suggest a Buddhist or Jain influence. See: Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. I, 1958. pp. 109–137.

28 The idea of achieving a higher life form on account of gains made over the course of many rebirths is clearly of Buddhist origin.

29 Klein, Wassilios: *Grosse Religionsstifter: Mani*, 1992. p. 85.

30 Klein, Wassilios: *Grosse Religionsstifter: Mani*, 1992. p. 89.

31 Lieu, Samuel N.C.: *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China*, 1998. p. 171.

32 Chaillot, Christine: *The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East*, 1998. p. 113f. Leroy, Jules: *Moines et Monastères du Proche-Orient*, 1958. p. 208. Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. I, 1958. pp. 138–145. It is typical that Bishop Thomas of Marga, writing around 840, did not mention the Egyptian Mor Augin, who reportedly brought monasticism from Egypt to Syria in the late fourth century. On the question of whether early Christian asceticism also developed out of Old Testament ideas, see: Corbett, John H.: They do not take wives, or build, or work the ground: Ascetic life in the early Syriac Church, 2003, pp. 3–20.

33 Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. II, p. 530.

34 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. p. 306.

35 Vööbus, *Arthur: History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960.p. 100.

36 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, 1990. p. 64.

37 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960.p. 257.

38 Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. I, p. CLiii.

39 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. p. 276.

40 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. p. 276.

41 See pp. 129ff.

42 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. I, 1958. p. 127.

43 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. p. 282f. Cf. Lk 6:21–25.

44 Sherwood, Polycarpe: Jean de Dalyata: Sur la fuite du Monde, 1956. p. 308.

45 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. p. 193.

46 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. p. 125.

47 Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. II, pp. 148ff.

48 The Acts of Thomas refer to marital love as 'nasty deeds', 'the impurity whose consequence is eternal damnation', 'filthy', 'an object of contempt', etc. § 84, 88. Hennecke, Edgar: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 1959. Vol. II, p.342f.

49 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. I, 1958. p. 93f. Vol. III, 1988. p. 6. Bowman, John: The Christian monastery on the island of Kharg, 1974–1975. p. 60f.

50 Kitchen, Robert A.: Becoming perfect: The maturing of asceticism in the Liber Graduum, 2002. pp. 32, 35f, 39f.

51 Vööbus Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, 1960. Vol. II, p. 99.

52 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, 1960. Vol. II, p. 178–196.

53 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, 1990. p. 62.

54 Nagel, Peter: Manichäisches im syrischen Liber Graduum?, 2002. p. 180f. More extreme still was a group of monks gathered around an ascetic named Timothy, as for them only monks were Christians. Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. p. 126.

55 Kitchen, Robert A.: Becoming perfect: The maturing of asceticism in the Liber Graduum, 2002, pp. 30–45.

56 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 99. Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. I, 1960. p. 186.

57 Klein, Wassilios: *Die Legende von Barlaam und Ioasaph als Programmschrift des Mönches Agapios Landos*, 1997. Parry, Ken: Images in the Church of the East, 1996. p. 151f. Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926. Vol. II, pp. 323–327.

58 Vorgrimler, Herbert: *Neues Theologisches Wörterbuch*, 2000. pp. 157ff, 484,505f. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1998. Vol. 9, p. 245; Vol. 14, p. 399f.

59 Haendler, Gert: *Die abendländische Kirche im Zeitalter der Völkerwanderung*, 1995. pp. 50ff.

60 Feldmann, Erich: Der junge Augustinus und Paulus: Ein Beitrag zur manichäischen Paulus-Rezeption, 1997. p. 73.

61 Mar Bawai Soro: *Understanding Church of the East Sacramental Theology from a Theodorian perspective*, 2002. p.7. Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. p.14f. See also: Kawerau, Peter: *Das Christentum des Ostens*, 1972. pp.48ff.

Chronique de Séert, 1950. Part I, vol. 2, p.290.

62 Mar Bawai Soro: *Understanding Church of the East Sacramental Theology from a Theodorian perspective*, 2002. p. 9f.

63 Johannes, Chrysostomus*: Kommentar zum Evangelium des Hl. Matthäus*, 1915. Vol. 4, p. 144f.

64 Raguin, Yves: La première évangélisation de la Chine par des moines syro-orientaux aux VII et VIIIème siècles, 1998. p. 134f. Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. III, 1988. p. 346.

65 Bar Kaldoun: *Histoire du Moine Rabban Youssef Bousnaya*, 1900. p. 48.

66 See pp. 187–193.

67 Youssif, Ephrem-Isa: *Les Philosophes et Traducteurs Syriaques*, 1997. p. 150.

68 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 210.

69 1. Cor 15:45. See also 15:22, 47; Rom 5:12–21.

70 Bezold, Carl (ed.): *Die Schatzhöhle: Syriches Text, arabische Version und Übersetzung*, 1981. p.6, n. 36.

71 Bezold, Carl (ed.): *Die Schatzhöhle*, 1981. p. 5f.

72 Bezold, Carl (ed.): *Die Schatzhöhle*, 1981. pp. 8–28.

73 Bezold, Carl (ed.): *Die Schatzhöhle*, 1981. p. 35f.

74 Bezold, Carl (ed.): *Die Schatzhöhle*, 1981. p. 38.

75 Bezold, Carl (ed.): *Die Schatzhöhle*, 1981. p. 62f.

76 Mohr, Gerd-Heinz: *Lexikon der Symbole: Bilder und Zeichen der Christlichen Kunst*, 1982. p. 45.

77 Bezold, Carl (ed.): *Die Schatzhöhle*, 1981. p. 63.

78 Mérigoux, Jean-Marie: *Va à Ninive!*, 2000. p. 277.

79 Bezold, Carl (ed.): *Die Schatzhöhle*, 1981. p. 5.

80 Mérigoux, Jean-Marie: *Va à Ninive!*, 2000. p. 276.

81 Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. p. 53. See here: p. 191.

82 The Greek work for fish is 'icthys', whose letters represent the salvation formula, written in Greek, Iesus CHristos THeou Yios Soter. This means 'Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour'. See: Orthbrandt, Eberhard and Teuffen, Dietrich Hans: *Ein Kreuz und tausend Wege*, 1962. p. 122.

83 Tézé, Jean-Marie: Les premières images de la croix, 1996. pp. 20ff.

84 Caillet, Jean-Pierre: L'art en écho des controverses théologiques, 2002. p. 48.

85 Orthbrandt, Eberhard and Teuffen, Dietrich Hans: *Ein Kreuz und tausend Wege*, 1962. p. 136.

86 Tézé, Jean-Marie: Les premières images de la croix, 1996. pp.24ff.

87 Dauvillier, Jean: Quelques témoignoges littéraires et archéologiques sur la présence et sur le culte des images dans l'ancienne Église chaldéene, 1956. p. 303. Regarding the few exceptions of Nestorian crucifixes, see: Leroy, Jules: *Les Manuscripts Syriaques à Peintures conservés dans les Bibliothèques d'Europe et d'Orient*, 1964. Vol. I, p. 45f.

88 Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. pp. 45f, 67.

89 Mar Yacub Daniel: Sign of the Cross, 2003. p. 139.

90 Parry, Ken: Images in the Church of the East, 1996. pp. 154ff. It would be incorrect, however, to characterize this type of cross as Nestorian, since it is also found in West Syrian regions, in the Caucasus, in Armenia, and elsewhere.

91 See pp. 180, 220ff.

92 Mar Bawai Soro: *Understanding Church of the East Sacramental Theology from a Theodorian perspective*, 2000. p. 13.

93 Mar Bawai Soro: *Understanding Church of the*

East Sacramental Theology from a Theodorian perspective, 2000. p. 2.

94 Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. pp. 45–63. Mar Bawai Soro: *Understanding Church of the East Sacramental Theology from a Theodorian perspective*, 2000. p. 24f.

95 Although Mar Odisho cites the sign of the cross as the seventh sacrament, in the corresponding section he discusses marriage and virginity. The sign of the cross is explained in another chapter, entitled Signs of the World to Come. He actually lists eight sacraments. See also: Vries, Wilhelm de: *Sakramententheologie bei den Nestorianern*, 1947.

96 Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. pp. 48ff.

97 Mt 18:18; John 20:23.

98 Birnie, M.J. Corbishop: *Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist in the Church of the East*, 2002. p. 4f. As a consequence of the idea, introduced by Augustine, of original sin, infant baptism spread quickly in the Roman Church. The first definitely verifiable infant baptisms were carried out as exceptional cases around the year 200. Others may have taken place earlier. Tröger, Karl-Wolfgang: *Das Christentum im zweiten Jahrhundert*, 1988. p. 106.

99 Only at the beginning of the thirteenth century was first communion in the Roman Catholic Church no longer granted to small children, and confirmation was separated from baptism in the Latin regions beginning in the third/fourth centuries. Vorgrimmler, Herbert: *Neues Theologisches Wörterbuch*, 2000. pp. 193, 609.

100 The special chrism (oil of anointing) is consecrated by the bishop or metropolitan on Maundy Thursday.

101 Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. p. 55. John 1:29.

102 The author observed this custom in October 2001 at the double church of Sts Sergius and Baccus in Bos Vatch near Urmiah. See also the following descriptions: Badger, George Percy: *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 1987. Vol. I, p. 234. Grant, Asahel: *The Nestorians; or the Lost Tribes*, 1841. p. 178. Wigram, W.A.: *The Assyrians and their Neighbours*, 1929. p. 191. The custom also incorporates the instructions to Moses before the Exodus. See Exodus 12:7–14.

103 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 237.

104 Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. p. 62.

105 Neumann, R., Huff, D. and Schnyder, R.: Takht-i Suleiman: Bericht über die Ausgrabungen 1965–1973, 1975. p. 159.

106 Bell, Gertrude L.: The Churches and Monasteries of Tur Abdin, 1910. p. 245f. Pognon, Henri: *Inscriptions sémitiques de la Syrie, de la Mésopotamie et de la région de Mossoul*, 1907. p. 42.

107 A choir screen dividing the choir from the nave was also found in European churches and cathedrals, but nearly all were removed during the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation.

108 It appears that the bema was less common south of Seleucia-Ctesiphon than it was in northern Mesopotamia. See: Cassis, Marica: The Bema in the East Syriac Church in the light of new archaeological evidence, 2002. pp. 9ff.

109 For details about the symbolism of the church's architectural structure, the author is indebted to numerous conversations, including, among others, those with Patriarch Mar Dinkha IV. See also: Aljeloo, Nicholas: *Religious expression in design and symbolism in the architecture of the Church of the East*, 2000. Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Mossoul Chrétienne*, 1959. pp. 65–84. Pognon, Henri: *Inscriptions sémitiques de la Syrie, de la Mésopotamie et de la région de Mossoul*, 1907. p. 97f. Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. II, p. 543f. Valognes, Jean-Pierre: *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 1994. p. 427.

110 Mar Aprem: The Anaphorae of Mar Theodore and Mar Nestorious, 2005. pp. 2–8 and 3 and 4, pp. 6–14. Valognes, Jean-Pierre: *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 1994. p. 426.

111 In the Church of the East, Easter, Pentecost and Epiphany are the three most important feast days.

112 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. p. 20.

113 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. pp. 25ff, 96, 111.

114 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. p. 97.

115 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. I, 1958. p. 88.

116 Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. I, pp. XXXIX, LXXIII. See also the first canon of the synod of Ezechiel of 576. Braun, Oskar (ed.): *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 172f.

117 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. p. 301.

118 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. p. 297.

119 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. p. 298.

120 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. II, 1960. p. 303.

121 Braun, Oskar: Ostsyrisches Mönchsleben, c. 1915. p. 38–45. See also: Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. I, pp. CXXXIV–CXL.

122 Bar Kaldoun: *Histoire du Moine Rabban Youssef Bousnaya*, 1900. pp. 21ff.

123 Braun, Oskar: Ostsyrisches Mönchsleben, c. 1915. pp. 45–51. See also: Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governor*s, 1893. Vol. I, pp. CXXXIX, CXLf.

124 Bar Kaldoun: *Histoire du Moine Rabban Youssef Bousnaya*, 1900. pp. 177f, 183.

125 Bar Kaldoun: *Histoire du Moine Rabban Youssef Bousnaya*, 1900. pp. 177f, 183

126 Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. III, 1988. pp. 87, 203–206.

127 Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. II, pp. 307–335.

128 Baumer, Christoph: *Tibet's Ancient Religion, Bön*, 2002. p. 40.

129 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 1965. Vol. I, p. 16.

130 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 1965. Vol. I, p. 16f.

131 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 1965. Vol. I, p. 13f, Vol. II, p. 827f. Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. III, 1988. pp. 384–89.

132 Information obtained from Mr Nicholas Al-Jeloo on 25 January 2003. At this time there were a few Nestorian nuns in Kerala and Iraq.

133 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalayatha*, 1990. pp. 14ff, 18, 235ff, 424ff.

134 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, 1990. p. 164.

135 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, 1990. p. 55.

136 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, 1990. p. 62.

137 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, 1990. p. 101.

138 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, 1990. p. 109.

139 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, 1990. p. 137.

140 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, 1990. p. 324.

141 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, 1990. p. 341.

142 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, 1990. p. 398.

143 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, 1990. p. 447.

144 Bar Kaldoun: *Histoire du Moine Rabban Youssef Bousnaya*, 1900. p. 214.

145 Alfeyev, Hilarion: *L'Univers spirituel d'Isaac le Syrien*, 2001. p. 330f. See also: Klein, Wassilios: *Syrische Kirchenväter* (ed.), 2004. pp. 136–141.

Notes to Chapter VII

1 Oussani, Gabriel: *Arabia in the Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1999. p. 13. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. pp. 37ff.

2 See pp. 91ff.

3 Bernard, Vincent, Callot, Olivier and Salles, Jean-François: L'église d'al-Qousour Failaka, État de Koweit, 1991. pp. 145–181. Bernard, Vincent and Salles, Jean-François: Discovery of a Christian church at Al-Qusur, Failaka (Kuwait), 1991. pp. 7–21. Calvet, Yves: Vestiges de l'expansion Chrétienne dans le Golfe, 1999. pp. 25–27. Crançon, Sophie: Le passé sous les dunes, 2001. p. 43. Elders, J.: The Nestorians in the Gulf Just Passing Through?, 2003. pp. 229–236. Gillman, Ian, Klimkeit and Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 78. Hellyer, P.: Nestorian Christianity in Pre-Islamic UAE and South-eastern Arabia, 2001. pp. 79–99. King Geoffrey, R.: The Coming of Islam and the Islamic Period in the UAE, 2001. pp. 77ff. King, Geoffrey R. and Hellyer, P.: A Pre-Islamic site on Sir Bani Yas, 1994. pp. 5–7. Meinardus, Otto: *Eine nestorianische Klosteranlage auf der Insel Kharg*, 1986. p. 38. Noja, Sergio (ed.): *L'Arabie avant l'Islam*, 1994. pp. 207ff. The ruins mentioned on the Arab side of the Persian Gulf most likely belonged to the Church of the East, but the possibility that, in individual cases, they belonged to the Syrian Orthodox Church cannot be ruled out.

4 Ryckmanns, Jean: Le Christianisme en Arabie du Sud préislamique, 1964. p. 415.

5 Gajda, Iwona: Les débuts du monothéisme en Arabie du Sud, 2002. pp. 611–614. Ryckmanns, Jean: Le Christianisme en Arabie du Sud préislamique, 1964. pp. 434ff. Wald, Peter: *Der Jemen*, 1992. p. 65. In Palmyra, an important trading city in the Syrian desert, an anonymous deity was also worshiped under the name al-

Rahmana. Brock, Sebastian et al.: *The Hidden Pearl*, 2001. Vol. 1, p. 136.
6 See p. 12.
7 Fakhry, Ahmed: *An Archaeological Journey to Yemen*, 1952. Vol. I, p. 108; Vol. II, pp. 46ff. Ryckmanns, Jean: Le Christianisme en Arabie du Sud préislamique, 1964. pp. 436ff.
8 Ryckmanns, Jean: Le Christianisme en Arabie du Sud préislamique, 1964. p. 436.
9 Graf, Georg: *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*, 1944. p. 21. Ryckmanns, Jean: Le Christianisme en Arabie du Sud préislamique, 1964. p. 418f.
10 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 277. Tardy, René: *Najran: Chrétiens d'Arabie avant l'islam*, 1999. pp. 83–90. Ryckmanns, Jean: Le Christianisme en Arabie du Sud préislamique, 1964. pp. 418f, 431, 444, 446. Certain authors doubt that the kings Abukarib Asad and Sharabhi al-Yakkûf converted to Judaism; for reasons of internal politics, they yielded to pressure from the powerful Jewish communities and for this reason oppressed the Christians. Tardy, René: *Najran: Chrétiens d'Arabie avant l'islam*, 1999. p. 88f.
11 Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. pp. 175ff.
12 *Chronique de Séert*, Part I, vol. 2, 1950. p. 330f. We cannot accept Tardy's argument that Hannan lived during the time of Yazdgerd II (438–457), since the Chronicle leaves no room for doubt that it refers to Yazdgerd I. Tardy, René: *Najran: Chrétiens d'Arabie avant l'islam*, 1999. pp. 100ff.
13 Tardy, René: *Najran: Chrétiens d'Arabie avant l'islam*, 1999. p. 135.
14 Ryckmanns, Jean: Le Christianisme en Arabie du Sud préislamique, 1964. p. 451.
15 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 278. The Koran, in sura 85, likewise reports a massacre; see also: Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. p. 178f. In 1982 archaeologists discovered in the former Ukhdud near Najran over 500 graves, in which some of the martyrs had been buried. Tardy, René: *Najran: Chrétiens d'Arabie avant l'islam*, 1999. p. 93.
16 Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. p. 184f.
17 Fakhry, Ahmed: *An Archaeological Journey to Yemen*, 1952. Vol. I, p. 76; Vol. II, p. 8f; Vol. III, plate XXVIII. Additional inscriptions of Abraha appealing to the Trinity date from 549 and 553. See: Ryckmanns, Jean: Le Christianisme en Arabie du Sud préislamique, 1964. p. 440.
18 Tardy, René: *Najran: Chrétiens d'Arabie avant l'islam*, 1999. p. 30.
19 Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. pp. 188–191.
20 Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. pp. 189ff.
21 Arab tradition dates Abraha's attack to Mohammed's birth year, 570, but a reliable inscription from southern Arabia gives the year as 552. See: Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. p. 233. Prémare, A.L. de: «Il voulut détruire le temple». L'attaque de la Ka'ba par les rois yéménites avant l'islam, 2000. p. 292. Sura 105 of the Koran attributes the victory of the Meccans to the help of Allah.
22 Graf, Georg: *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*, 1944. p. 27.
23 Graf, Georg: *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*, 1944. pp. 24, 34. Ibn Ishaq: *Das Leben des Propheten: 8. Jh. Aus dem Arabischen übertragen von Gernot Rotter*, 1976. pp. 38, 283. Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. pp. 379ff.
24 Busse, Heribert: Die bedeutenden biblischen Gestalten im Koran, 2000. p. 55.
25 Faü, Jean-François: Premiers Chrétiens d'Arabie, 2002. p. 65. Robin, Christian: Les religions de l'Arabie avant l'islam, 2000, p. 33.
26 Faü, Jean-François: Premiers Chrétiens d'Arabie, 2002. p. 64. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 81. See also: Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. II, p. 448.
27 See p. 28.
28 Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926. Vol. II, p. 406f.
29 Missick, Stephen Andrew: Socotra: The Mysterious Island of the Church of the East, 2002. p. 107.
30 Wald, Peter: *Der Jemen*, 1992. p. 291f.
31 Graf, Georg: *Der Sprachgebrauch der ältesten christlich-arabischen Literatur*, 1905. p. 2. *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*, 1944. pp. 86ff.
32 The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures.
33 Graf, Georg: *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*, 1944. pp. 89, 150f, 173. Vööbus, Arthur: *Early versions of the New Testament*, 1954. pp. 280ff, 288, 404. Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 70.
34 Flusin, Berhard: Réactions à la conquête arabe, 2000, p. 52.
35 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 29.
36 Suras 3:90f; 4:137; 47:25 etc.
37 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. pp. 601–618. Erhart, Victoria: The Church of the East during the period of the four rightly-guided caliphs, 1996. pp. 65ff. Faü, Jean-François: Premiers Chrétiens d'Arabie, 2002. p. 61. Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. III, 1871. pp. 179ff.
38 Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. III, 1871. p. 181.
39 Morgan, David: *Medieval Persia 1040–1797*, 1988. p. 15. In contrast to the Christians of Iran, who had always lived as an independent minority, the Zoroastrian faith community soon collapsed under Islam, since it lost its former all-encompassing support from the state. Today there are still Zoroastrians, mainly in the Iranian cities of Yazd and Kerman, as well as in Indian Bombay (Mumbai), where they are called Parsees, i.e., Persians.
40 Sura 9:5. See also: Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. III, 1871. p. 178f.
41 Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. III, 1871. p. 213.
42 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 27. Tardy, René: *Najran: Chrétiens d'Arabie avant l'islam*, 1999. p. 167.
43 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 87f. Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. III, 1871. p. 429f.
44 Canon 6 of the synod of 676 declared: 'Disputes among Christians shall be settled in the Church. But no believer should submit to the judgement of a judge of the unbelievers without the order of the bishop and the agreement of the community in the word of the Lord, as long as a compelling order is not issued by the secular authority.' Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodicon Orientale*, 1975. p. 339.
45 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 146.
46 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. pp. 353, 359f.
47 Mingana, A.: *A Charter of Protection granted to the Nestorian Church in A.D. 1138 by Muktafi II, Caliph of Bagdad*, 1926. p. 6f (shortened).
48 *Chronique de Séert*, Part II, vol. 2, 1919. pp. 621ff. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. pp. 202ff
49 Ye'or, Bat: *Der Niedergang des orientalischen Christentums unter dem Islam*, 2002. p. 75.
50 Ye'or, Bat: *Der Niedergang des orientalischen Christentums unter dem Islam*, 2002. p. 120f.
51 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 203.
52 In times of détente, churches could be repaired or rebuilt by means of bribery.
53 Ye'or, Bat: *Der Niedergang des orientalischen Christentums unter dem Islam*, 2002. p. 98.
54 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 27. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. pp. 202ff. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 69f. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 346.
55 Bar Hebraeus: *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, 1932. Vol. I, p. 141. Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 58f. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 358. Vööbus, Arthur: *History of Ascetism in the Syrian Orient*, vol. III, 1988. p. 367f.
56 When the Turkish ruler Nur ad-Din (1118–1174) conquered Mosul in 1173 he forced the Jews to wear a red piece of cloth on their clothing. Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Mossoul Chrétienne*, 1959. p. 38.
57 Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. p. 56. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 240. Hübner, Ulrich: Palästina, Syrien und die Seidenstrasse, 2001. pp. 115ff. In Egypt, in the early twelfth century, a Nestorian doctor dared to have the great monastery of St George near Cairo restored, whereupon the Fatimid caliph seized it. The Nestorian community of Egypt declined rapidly in significance; the last report of a church in Damietta dates from 1346. In Jerusalem the East Syrian monastic community disappeared in the eighteenth century. Meinardus, Otto: *The Nestorians in Egypt*, 1967. pp. 119–122.
58 Juvaini, Ata-Malik: *The History of the World-Conqueror*, 1958. Vol. II, p. 654. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 382f.
59 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 45.
60 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 383. Bar Hebraeus: *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, 1932. Vol. I, p. 184f.
61 Flusin, Berhard: Réactions à la conquête arabe, 2000, pp. 49–55.
62 Tubach, Jürgen: The Veneration of the Apostle Thomas in the Church Province of Persis, 2002. p. 22.
63 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 138f.
64 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 29. Le Coz Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 143.
65 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 172.
66 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 352.
67 Thomas, Bishop of Marga: *The Book of Governors*, 1893. Vol. II, pp. 382–386.
68 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en*

Irak, 1994. p. 47.
69 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 351 (shortened).
70 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 276. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 351.
71 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. pp. 49, 155f.
72 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 1968. Vol. III, pp. 104–129. Gockel, Wolfgang: *Irak*, 2001. p. 237f.
73 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 1968. Vol. III, p. 120.
74 Until the Turkish conquest of Mesopotamia in 1055 there were often influential Nestorian secretaries, and twice Nestorian viziers. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. pp. 168ff.
75 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 380.
76 Haussig, Hans Wilhelm: *Die Geschichte Zentralasiens und der Seidenstrasse in vorislamischer Zeit*, 1992. p. 224. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p.385.
77 See p. 86f
78 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 38.
79 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 199.
80 Le Coz, Raymond: *Les médecins «nestoriens» au moyen age*, 2000. p. 10.
81 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 42.
82 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 197f. *Les médecins «nestoriens» au moyen age*, 2000. p. 4.
83 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. pp. 66–71. Le Coz, Raymond: *Les médecins «nestoriens» au moyen age*, 2000. pp. 14–18. Another famous translator of Greek works was Theodoros Abu Qurrah (†820), a Melkite bishop of Harran, about 40 kilometres southwest of Edessa. See: Klein, Wassilios: *Syrische Kirchenväter* (ed.), 2004. p. 92.
84 See pp. 164ff.
85 Youssif, Ephrem-Isa: *Les Philosophes et Traducteurs Syriaques*, 1997. p. 104f.
86 Baumer, Christoph and Weber, Therese: *Eastern Tibet*, 2005. p. 138.
87 Youssif, Ephrem-Isa: *Les Philosophes et Traducteurs Syriaques*, 1997. p. 109.
88 Youssif, Ephrem-Isa: *Les Philosophes et Traducteurs Syriaques*, 1997. p. 161.
89 Ibn, Ishaq: *Das Leben des Propheten*, 1976. pp.34ff. Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. II, 1869. pp. 244ff, 381f.
90 The Islamic tradition calls the monk Bahira, the Syrian Nestorius, Yuhanna or Sergius. Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 73.
91 Bahira is making an allusion to the crucifixion of Christ. Ibn, Ishaq: *Das Leben des Propheten*, 1976. p. 36.
92 Bauschke, Martin: *Jesus im Koran*, 2001. p. 6. Parzanay, Ulrich: *Jesus im Koran*, 1981. p. 3f.
93 See p. 45
94 Tabari: *Chronique*, Vol. I, 1867. p. 563f.
95 Kawerau, Peter: *Das Christentum des Ostens*, 1972. p. 92.
96 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. pp. 250–253.
97 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 280f.
98 Because we have already explained these dogmatic points in the earlier sections, we will not reiterate them here.
99 See chapt. I, note 10.
100 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. pp. 152–155.
101 Personal conversation of the patriarch with the author on 2 June 2001. Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 156f.
102 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. pp. 158f, 254.
103 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 159f.
104 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 161f.
105 See p. 146.
106 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 163f. See also: Griffith, Sidney H.: *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic*, 2002. pp. 162ff.
107 See also Sura 2:154; 3:157f, 169. The counter-argument sometimes put forth that the Crusades could likewise be seen as profitable holy wars does not change the fundamental distinction that, in the Koran, war is praised as a divinely sanctioned means to spread the religion, while this is certainly not the case in the New Testament. See, for instance, the Sermon on the Mount, Mt 5:44.
108 Griffith, Sidney H.: *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic*, 2002. p. 181. Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. pp. 165, 243–246.
109 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 261f.
110 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. pp. 254–259.
111 Griffith, Sidney H.: *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic*, 2002. p. 180.
112 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. pp. 236–239.
113 Griffith, Sidney H.: *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic*, 2002. p. 179.
114 Griffith, Sidney H.: *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic*, 2002. p. 178.
115 Griffith, Sidney H.: *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic*, 2002. p. 179f.
116 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 227.
117 Regarding the question of the extent to which Christianity influenced the rationalist theology of the early Islamic Mu'tazilites, see: Anawati G.C.: Théologie Chrétienne et théologie Mo'tazilite d'après des travaux récents, 1964. pp. 525–546. Badawi, Abdurrahman: *Hisoire de la Philosophie en Islam*, 1972. Vol. I, pp. 47–53. Legends equally popular among Christians and Muslims, such as the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, have little to do with Christian influence on Islam and are based instead on Greek folklore. See: Tabari: *Chronique*, vol. I, 1867. p. 38; vol. II, 1869. pp. 32–44. Bowker, John: *Das Oxford-Lexikon der Weltreligionen*, 1999. p. 923.
118 The Alawites believe in a trinity consisting of Ali, Mohammed and the angel Gabriel; they venerate Jesus and Hussein as martyrs and celebrate Christian holidays. The Syrian ruling family of al-Asad is Alawite. See: Bar-Asher, M.M.: Sur les éléments chrétiens de la religion Nusayrite-'Alawite, 2001. pp. 185–216.
119 Grant, Asahel: *The Nestorians; or the Lost Tribes*, 1841. pp. 6, 205f, 309. See also: Badger, George Percy*: The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 1987. Vol. II, p. 132. Perkins, Justin: *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia among the Nestorian Christians*, 1843. p. 20f.
120 For example, Stewart, John: *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise*, 1928. p. 123.
121 Exod 20:4; Deut 5:8.
122 Hopkins, Clark: *The Discovery of Dura-Europos*, 1979. p. 142.
123 Döpmann, Hans-Dieter: *Die Ostkirchen vom Bil-derstreit bis zur Kirchspaltung von 1054*, 1991. p. 34.
124 Hopkins, Clark: *The Discovery of Dura-Europos*, 1979. pp. 90–96, 110–116.
125 Döpmann, Hans-Dieter: *Die Ostkirchen vom Bilderstreit bis zur Kirchspaltung von 1054*, 1991. p. 36f.
126 Herzfeld, Ernst: Die Malereien von Samarra, 1927. p. 1.
127 Döpmann, Hans-Dieter: *Die Ostkirchen vom Bil-derstreit bis zur Kirchspaltung von 1054*, 1991. p. 46.
128 Desreumaux, Alain: *Histoire du roi Abgar et de Jésus*, 1993. p. 137. Leroy, Jules: *Les Manuscripts Syriaques à Peintures conservés dans les Bibliothèques d'Europe et d'Orient*, 1964. Vol. I, p. 39.
129 Braun, Oskar: *Ausgewählte Akten persischer Märtyrer*, c. 1915. p. 164.
130 Reuther, O.: The German Excavations at Ctesiphon, 1929. p. 450f, plate VI. It is doubtful whether both the church ruins that have been discovered are of the Cathedral of Kokhe. See: Cassis, Marica: Kokhe, cradle of the Church of the East: An archaeological and comparative study, 2002, pp. 64, 66.
131 Rice, D. Talbot: The Oxford Excavations at Hira, 1932. p. 281
132 Herzfeld, Ernst: Die Malereien von Samarra, 1927. p. 3.
133 Arnold, Thomas W.: *The Old and New Testaments in Muslim Religious Art*, 1932. p. 9. Herzfeld, Ernst: Die Malereien von Samarra, 1927. pp. 85f, 91; plates LXI–LXIII. We believe that these paintings must be Nestorian, since only the Nestorian patriarch resided in Samarra, and there was a large Nestorian population there.
134 Dauvillier, Jean: Les Provinces Chaldéennes «de l'Extérieur» au Moyen Age, 1948. p. 275. Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 135.
135 Arnold, Thomas W.: *The Old and New Testaments in Muslim Religious Art*, 1932. p. 8. Delly, E.: Le Culte des Saintes Images dans l'Église Syrienne Orientale, 1956. pp. 293–296.
136 Dauvillier, Jean: Quelques témoignages littéraires et archéologiques sur la présence et sur le culte des images dans l'ancienne Église chaldéenne, 1956. p. 297.
137 Leroy, Jules: *Les Manuscripts Syriaques à Peintures conservés dans les Bibliothèques d'Europe et d'Orient*, 1964. Vol. I, p. 42. Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh*, 2000. p. 108.
138 Leroy, Jules: *Les Manuscripts Syriaques à Peintures conservés dans les Bibliothèques d'Europe et d'Orient*, 1964. Vol. I, pp. 208–219, 236f, 261f, 367–371, 389f, 296–403, 404–408, 417f, 422, 426. Vol. II, plates 43–48, 55, 65f, 125f, 141.1, 151–155, 150.
139 Grünwedel, Albert: *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesisch-Turkistan*, 1912. p. 339. Le Coq,

Albert von: *Chotscho*, 1979. Plate 7. Yaldiz, Marianne (ed.): *Magische, Götterwelten*, 2000. p. 224

140 Whitfield, Roderick: *The Art of Central Asia*, 1982. Vol. I, plate 25, Fig. 76, p. 322. However, the Manichaeans also used the symbol of the cross, as A. von Le Coq established in 1923. Le Coq, Albert von: *Die Buddhistische Spätantike in Mittelasien*, 1973. Vol. II, p. 25.

141 Two additional platters featuring four and seven riders are not yet published. Baulo, A.V.: Silver Plate from the Malaya Ob, 2000. pp. 1, 8–13. Chuvin, Pierre (ed.): *Les arts de l'Asie Centrale*, 1999. plate 215, p. 161. Haussig, Hans Wilhelm: *Archäologie und Kunst der Seidenstrasse*, 1992. p. 230. Jarrige, Jean-François (ed.): *L'Asie des steppes d'Alexandre le Grand à Gengis Khan*, 2000. p. 77. Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh*, 2000. p. 107f. Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: Christian Art on the Silk Road, 1993. pp. 480ff.

142 Foster, John: Crosses from the Walls of Zaitun, 1954. plates VIII, XI, XVIf, p. 20f. Parry, Ken: Images in the Church of the East, 1996. Plate 5, p. 157f. Wang, Lianmao: *Return to the City of Light*, 2000. p. 112ff.

143 On the Nestorian mission to China, see pp. 181ff.

144 Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the year 1500*, 1973. p. 39. Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. p. 175.

145 Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. pp. 92f, 139. Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the year 1500,* 1973. p. 40f. Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou,* 1996. pp. 176, 242.

146 Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. p. 124.

147 Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1973. p. 251.

148 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 174.

Notes to Chapter VIII

1 Concerning the terms 'Turkic' and 'Turkish' see note 1, chapter IX.

2 Mingana, A: 'The early spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East: A new document', 1925. pp. 304f.

3 Hunter, Erica: The conversion of the Kerait to Christianity in AD 1007, 1991. p. 159. Mingana, A.: The early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East, 1925. p. 305f.

4 Dickens, Mark: 'Patriarch Timothy I and the Metropolitan of the Turks', 2010. pp. 117-21. Mingana, A.: The early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East, 1925. p. 306.

4a Dickens, Mark: 'Patriarch Timothy I and the Metropolitan of the Turks', 2010. pp. 127f.

5 Dickens, Mark: 'Patriarch Timothy I and the Metropolitan see of the Turks', 2010. p. 123. Dauvillier, Jean: Les Provinces Chaldéennes «de l'Extérieur» au Moyen Age, 1948. p. 284f. Mingana, A.: The early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East, 1925. p. 323f.

6 Savchenko, Alexei: *The Monastery of Urgut investigated by the East Sogdian Archaeological Expedition*, 1999. p. 2.

7 Marco Polo never visited Samarqand, but his father Niccolo and his uncle Matteo did around 1262. Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926. Vol. I, pp. 183–186.

8 Dickens Mark: *Syriac Inscriptions near Urgut, Uzbekistan*. Forthcoming. As the author had unfortunately to notice in September 2004, several of the inscriptions have been cut out to be sold on the antiques black market or hammered away.

9 Ibn Hawqal: *La Configuration de la Terre*, 2001. Vol. II, p. 477f. Savchenko, Alexei: *The Monastery of Urgut investigated by the East Sogdian Archaeological Expedition*, 1999. p. 2f. Vasiliy Bartold suspected already in 1894 that Ibn Hawqal's monastery might be located near Urgut. Bartold, Vasiliy: 'On the Christian settlement of Wazkerd'. In: Turkestan Gazette No. 21, 1894.

10 Dreswanskaya has shown that the censer was locally manufactured and not brought from Mesopotamia. Dreswanskaya, G.A.: Bronzovoye kadilo iz Urguta, 1995. pp. 19f. There are indications that two gravestones kept in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, stem from Urgut as well. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. Plate 22. Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. p. 226f. Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: Christian Art on the Silk Road, 1993. p. 482, plate 11. Paykova, Aza Vladimirovna: The Syrian Ostracon from Panjikant, 1979. p. 161f. Savchenko Alexei: Urgut revisited, 1996. pp. 334, 337. *The Monastery of Urgut investigated by the East Sogdian Archaeological Expedition*, 1999. Abb. 1.

11 Dickens, Mark: *Syriac inscriptions near Urgut, Uzbekistan*, forthcoming. Savchenko, Alexei and Dickens, Mark: *Prester John's realm: New light on Christianity between Merv and Turfan.* In: Hunter, Erica (ed.): *The Christian Heritage of Iraq.* Collected Papers from the Christianity of Iraq I-V Seminar Days. Gorgias Press, Piscataway 2009. pp. 121-35. The Society for the Exploration of EurAsia, Urgut. Reports 2005-2008. http://www.exploration-eurasia.com/EurAsia/inhalt_english/frameset_projekt_2.html

12 Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler Dietmar W.: *The Church of the East*, 2003. Fig. 2.2. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. Plates 17, 18, p. 213. Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: Christian Art on the Silk Road, 1993. p. 480. Naymark, Aleksandr: Sogdiana, its Christians and Byzantium, 2001. pp. 180–184. 245, 288–295. Paykova, Aza Vladimirovna: The Syrian Ostracon from Panjikant, 1979. pp. 159–169. Rtveladze, E.V.: Tashkhodzhayew Sh.S.: Ob odnoy tiurkosogsiyskoy monete s khrstianskim simvolom, 1973. pp. 232ff, plate 1. Savchenko, Alexei: Urgut revisited, 1996. p. 338f. Shkoda, V.G.: Podrazhaniye vizantiyskoy monete iz Pendzikenta, 1983. pp. 196–201, Plate 2 opposite p. 193.

13 Al-'baum, L.I.: *Xristianskij xram v starom Termeze*, 1994. pp. 34–41. The cave complex was surveyed by Huw Thomas in 2014. www.rsaa.org.uk/blog/2016/02/02/in-sea.

14 Jagodin, V.N. and Khodjaiov, T: *Nekropol driewniego Mizdachana*, 1970. pp. 146ff.

15 Pander, Klaus: *Sowjetischer Orient: Kuns und Kultur, Gerchichte und Gegenwant der Völker Mittelasiens*, 1988. p. 29. Tucker, Jonathan: *The Silk Road: Art and History*, 2003. p. 213.

16 Transoxania stretches between the rivers Oxus (Amu Darya) and Jaxertes (Syr Darya).

17 The site of the historical battle is unclear. The Chinese sources name Samarqand, the Arabic the river Talas. Talas in southern Kazakhstan is most probably the correct site. Biasi, Pierre-Marc de and Douplitzky, Karine: *La saga du papier*, 1999. p. 80. See also: Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. p. 119. Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. pp. 32f. Pander, Klaus: *Sowjetischer Orient*, 1988. p. 29

18 Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926. Vol. II, p. 177. Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. pp. 145–149.

19 Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh*, 2000. pp. 201–213, 291f. The second period under the Mongols is discussed on pp. 209f.

20 Klein, Wassilios and Reck, Christiane: Ein Kreuz mit sogdischer Inschrift aus Ak-Beshim/ Kyrgyzstan, 2004. pp. 147–156. Semenov, G.L.: *Suyab*: *Ak-Beschim*, 2002. pp. 93f.

21 Semenov, G.L.: *Suyab*: *Ak-Beschim*, 2002. pp. 50ff.

22 Semenov, G.L.: *Suyab*: *Ak-Beschim*, 2002. pp. 79–84. The fragments have unfortunately been locked away since 1999, when the authorities suddenly stopped the excavations. The refusal to resume the excavations is the more deplorable as only the upper part of the triple church has been searched.

23 Semenov, G.L.: *Suyab*: *Ak-Beschim*, 2002. pp. 71ff.

24 Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. pp. 112f.

25 Barthold, W.: *Zur Geschichte des Christentums in Mittel-Asien bis zur mongolischen Eroberung*, 1901. p. 45f. Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. pp. 109, 113–121, 128–132, 139–146, 202, 370. Moqaddasi, Muhammed ibn Ahmed al-: *Ahson at-taqasim fi ma'arifat al-aqalim*, 1906. p. 275. Rubruk narrates: 'We left the town [of Caialic] on the feast of St. Andrew [30 November 1253] and came after six li [a Chinese unit of length measuring about 550m] to a village inhabited by Nestorians. We entered the church and sung full of joy and with loud voice the Salve Regina.' Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Großkhan der Mongolen*, 1984. pp. 104, 115.

26 Dauvillier, Jean: Les Provinces Chaldéennes «de l'Extérieur» au Moyen Age, 1948. p. 283f. Mingana, A.: The early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East, 1925. p. 306.

27 Chen, Huaiyu: 'The encounter of Nestorian Christianity with Tantric Buddhism in medieval China', 2009, p. 209.

28 Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. p. 86.

29 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 224f.

30 Dauvillier, Jean: Les Provinces Chaldéennes «de l'Extérieur» au Moyen Age, 1948. p. 293f. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. pp. 223f, 337. Uray, Géza: *Tibet's connections with Nestorianism and Manichaeism in the eighth – tenth centuries*, 1983. pp. 404–407. However, a Manichaean interpretation may not be entirely ruled out. See: Hunter, Erica: *The Church of the East in Central*

Asia, 1996. pp. 135f. Also a Buddhist context is possible. Sims-Williams, Nicholas. 'The Sogdian Inscription of Ladakh', 1993. pp. 151-63.

31 Baumer, Christoph: *Die Südliche Seidenstrasse*, 2002. pp. 8ff.

32 Baumer, Christoph: *Die Südliche Seidenstrasse*, 2002. pp. 34ff. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. pp. 223, 225. Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. pp. 54f, 206f, 250f. Stein, Aurel: *Serindia*, 1921. Vol. I, p. 465.

33 See pp. 164ff (VII: iconoclastic?).

34 The digital Turfan archive of the Berlin-Brandenburg Akademie der Wissenschaften, containing 496 Christian-Sogdian fragments, is accessible at: www.bbaw.de/vh/turfan/dta_main_index.html. See also: Sims-Williams, Nicholas: Die christlich-sogdischen Handschriften aus Bulayiq, 1991. pp. 119–125. Some individual pieces come from other sites in the foothills of Turfan.

35 Sims-Williams, Nicholas: Die christlich-sogdischen Handschriften aus Bulayiq, 1991. p. 120.

36 Litvinsky, B.A.: Christianity, Indian and local religions, 1996. p. 426. If we include Pelliot tibétain 351 the total is seven languages.

36a I thank Dr Mark Dickens and Dr Desmond Durkin-Meisteramt (email to the author dated 12 April 2016) for drawing my attention to the proper dating of this Nestorian psalter from Turfan.

37 Le Coq, Albert von: *Buried Treasures of Chinese Turkestan*, 1928. p. 100f. Maróth, Miklós: Die syrischen Handschriften in der Turfan-Sammlung, 1991. p. 127. Sims-Williams, Nicholas: Die christlich-sogdischen Handschriften aus Bulayiq, 1991. pp. 119–125.

38 Maróth, Miklós: Die syrischen Handschriften in der Turfan-Sammlung, 1991. p. 128. Sims-Williams, Nicholas: Die christlich-sogdischen Handschriften aus Bulayiq, 1991. p. 121.

39 The monophysite community of the Chinese city of Taiyüan in the province of Shansi, described by Haussig, appears to us to be speculative. Haussig, Hans Wilhelm: *Die Geschichte Zentralasiens und der Seidenstrasse in vorislamischer Zeit*, 1992. Vol. I, pp. 218ff, 226ff. See also: Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 220f. Klein, Wassilios: Das Orthodoxe Katholikat von Romagyris in Zentralasien, 1999. pp. 236–265. Pelliot, Paul: *Recherches sur les Chrétiens d'Asie Centrale et d'Extrême-Orient*, 1973. p. 11f.

40 Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: Die Begegnung von Christentum, Gnosis und Buddhismus an der Seidenstrasse, 1986. p. 16f. Hage, Wolfgang: Das Christentum in der Turfan-Oase, 1987. pp. 53ff. The apologetic character of these two legends, translated into Sogdian and adapted to local conditions, attests to their having been written in Turfan.

41 Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: Die Begegnung von Christentum, Gnosis und Buddhismus an der Seidenstrasse, 1986. p. 17f. Regarding the Nestorian dialogue with Taoists and Buddhists, see pp. 188ff.

42 Hage, Wolfgang: *Untersuchungen zum Leben der Christen Zentralasiens im Mittelalter*, 1970. pp. 37, 65.

43 Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Die Seidenstrasse: Handelsweg und Kulturbrücke zwischen Morgen- und Abendland*, 1988. p. 102.

44 Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. p. 90. Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. pp. 57, 456.

45 Baumer, Christoph: *Die Südliche Seidenstrasse*, 2002. p. 29.

46 The most detailed descriptions of the stele, as well as discussion of their location and discovery, is found in the work of the following authors. The translation of the inscription is found on the pages indicated by square brackets: Holm, Frits: *My Nestorian Adventure in China*, 1924. pp. 145–157, 264ff [158–183]. Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. pp. 17–31. Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. pp. 27–33 [34–52]. Palmer, Martin: *The Jesus Sutras*, 2001. pp. 4–10 [224–323]. Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. pp. 5–94, 169f [173–180]. Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Monument in China*, 1916. pp. 1–161, [162–180]. *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. pp. 11–51 [55–77].

47 Slightly shortened translation from: Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. p. 175. Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. p. 57f. The Chinese term 'Ta Qin' means, essentially, 'in the west', and was used to refer to the eastern Mediterranean region.

48 Chavannes, Édouard: Le Nestorianisme et l'Inscription de Kara-Balgassoun, 1897. pp. 58–62. It is unclear whether the statements from 621 and 631 refer to the same temple. See also: Foster, John: *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty*, 1939. p. 20f.

49 Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. pp. 359–367. We do not know if Nestorian merchants lived in Chang'an even before Alopen's arrival. As Max Deeg showed, the Chinese name Alopen is not a transcription for Biblical names such as Abraham or Yahballaha, but for the Middle-Iranian name Ardaban. Deeg, Max: 'Ways to go and not to go in the contextualisation of the Jingjiao documents of the Tang period', 2009. pp. 147f.

50 Tubach, Jürgen: Die nestorianische Kirche in China, 1999. p. 66.

51 Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. p. 363f. See also: Forte, Antonio: The edict of 638 allowing the diffusion of Christianity in China, 1996. p. 403.

52 Eskildsen, Stephen: Christology and Soteriology in the Chinese Nestorian Texts, 2002. p. 199f. Palmer, Martin: *The Jesus Sutras*, 2001. pp. 15f, 48f. Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. p. 241. Regarding the proximity of Chinese Nestorianism to Taoism, see the following section.

53 Slightly shortened translation from: Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. p. 176. Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. p. 59.

54 Foster, John: *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty*, 1939. p. 61. *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 2001. p. 26–30.

55 Slightly shortened translation from: Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. pp. 176.

56 Foster, John: *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty*, 1939. pp. 64–69.

57 We find unpersuasive the counter-argument that a General Abraham – who was of Persian descent, died in 710 and was allegedly Nestorian – served in the last decades of the seventh century on the border with Tibet, as his gravestone makes no mention of religious affiliation. See: Forte, Antonio: On the so-called Abraham from Persia, 1996. pp. 375f, 386, 390. Hage, Wolfgang: *Untersuchungen zum Leben der Christen Zentralasiens im Mittelalter*, 1970. p. 31f. . Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. pp. 453ff.

58 Foster, John: *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty*, 1939. pp. 72ff. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992, pp. 296f. Moule A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. pp. 65ff. Did Bishop Gabriel already bear the title of metropolitan? We do not know.

59 Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. p. 177.

60 *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 2001. pp. 8, 30. Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. p. 67. Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. p. 177.

61 Chavannes, Edouard: Le Nestorianisme et l'Inscription de Kara-Balgassoun, 1897. p. 65. Lieu, Samuel N.C.: From Iran to South China: The eastward passage of Manichaeism, 1998. p. 16.

62 Chavannes, Édouard: Le Nestorianisme et l'Inscription de Kara-Balgassoun, 1897. p. 64f.

63 Brentjes, Burchard: *Die Ahnen Dschingis-Chans*, 1988. p. 143. Khan Alp Qutlugh disliked Manichaeism; in 779/780 he had his uncle and predecessor Muyu Khan, as well as 2000 Sogdian Manichaeans, murdered. Tremblay, Xavier: *Pour une histoire de la Sérinde*, 2001. p. 109f.

64 Slightly shortened translation from: Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. p. 178.

65 Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. pp. 104, 110–112. Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. pp. 248ff.

66 Forte, Antonio: The Chongfu-Si in Chang'an: A neglected Buddhist monastery and Nestorianism, 1996. pp. 442–447. Li Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. p. 24f. Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. pp. 462–470.

67 Foster, John: *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty*, 1939. p. 118f.

68 Baumer, Christoph: *Tibet's Ancient Religion. Bön,* 2002. p. 123f.

69 Shortened translation from: Chavannes Édouard: Le Nestorianisme et l'Inscription de Kara-Balgassoun, 1897. pp. 72ff. Foster, John: *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty*, 1939. pp. 121–126. Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. pp. 471ff.

70 Foster, John: *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty*, 1939. pp. 123, 125. Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. p. 473. Since Zoroastrianism had no monasticism, this must refer to priests.

71 Foster, John: *The Church of the T'ang Dynasty*, 1939. p. 130. Moule A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. p. 76.

72 Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. p. 75f.

73 By 'syncretism' we here mean not the use of non-Christian terms such as 'Buddha' for 'God'

or 'God the Father', but rather the adoption of non-Christian beliefs into the Christian faith. The abandonment of essential Christian ideas forms a preliminary step towards this.

74 We are following the analysis of the Sinologist Li Tang, published in 2001, which recognizes, next to the stone inscription, as authentic six documents, one of which consists of three fragments. The two debated documents are called in the scholarly literature Kojima A and B, after the name of their 'discoverer'. The title of the Kojima A text is *Praise of the Transfiguration of the Great Holy One*, and Kojima B is the purported continuation of the *Book of the Origin of the Enlightening Religion* of Ta Qin. While P.Y. Saeki was the first to publish these two texts as bona fide in 1949/1951, in 1992 Lin Wushu and Rong Xinjiang announced serious doubts about their authenticity, pointing to contradictions between the colophons of 717 and of 720 and the use of certain expressions, as well as inconsistencies regarding the 'story of their discovery'. The authors believe that they were forged after 1937, using ancient paper. Today both manuscripts are lost. However, several authors, such as, for instance, Gilman and Klimkeit, Moffett, Eskildsen and Martin Palmer have ignored these reservations and cover up the scholarly discussion. In the following section we abstain from an interpretation of Kojima A and B. However, we do reject as incomprehensible the additional questioning of the two Alopen texts of 635/641 or 641 by Lin Wushu in 2001 on the basis of criteria of content. See: Enoki, Kazuo: The Nestorian Christianism in China in Medieval Time according to recent historical and archaeological researches, 1964. pp.45–77. Eskildsen, Stephen: Christology and Soteriology in the Chinese Nestorian Texts, 2002. p.183. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim.: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. pp.276–282. Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. pp.105–124. Lin, Wushu and Rong, Xinjiang: Doubts Concerning the Authenticity of Two Nestorian Christian Documents Unearthed at Dunhuang from the Li Collection, 1996. pp.5–14. Additional notes on the authenticity of Nestorian Tomioka and Takasuku's Manuscripts, 2003. p.1–9. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992, 320f. Palmer, Martin: *The Jesus Sutras*, 2001. pp.50–56, 177–205. Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. pp.113–124, 248–265, 313a–d, 314a–c.

75 Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. p. 147. See p. 134f.

76 Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. p. 148.

77 Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. p. 150f.

78 In the extant fragment Alopen speaks only of the One God; he does not mention the Trinity. Perhaps this occurred in the missing part.

79 Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. p. 164f (shortened).

80 Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. p. 197f. We deem as incorrect Martin Palmer's interpretation, according to which Alopen adopted the ideas of reincarnation and karma. Nowhere does Alopen teach that bad karma may be worked through in later reincarnations in this world; to the contrary, he appeals to people to grasp their only chance now. See: Palmer, Martin: *The Jesus Sutras*, 2001. pp. 137f, 142f, 212.

81 Li, Tang: A *Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. p. 167.

82 See pp. 164ff.

83 Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. p. 169.

84 See p. 135.

85 Obviously, the editing of the two texts succeeded thanks to the help of Buddhist and Taoist scholars.

86 Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. p. 174.

87 We are using Paul Pelliot's translation from: Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. pp. 173ff.

88 Hennecke, Edgar: *Neutestamentliche Apokryphen*, 1959. Vol. II, p. 158. See also: Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: Das Kreuzsymbol in der zentralasiatischen Religionsbegegnung, 2002. p.261.

89 At the time of the Tang, Buddhism, as a living religion of the people, adopted so much from Taoism that the term 'Tao-Buddhism' would seem permissible.

90 See p. 134.

91 See p. 117.

92 See pp. 132ff.

93 Beulay, Robert: *L'Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyatha*, 1990. pp. 190, 393.

94 The listing of 27 books of the New Testament instead of the 22 of the East Syrian canon is surprising, as the 27 books accord with the Latin-Catholic and Greek-Byzantine canon. This definition of the New Testament on the stele has still not been satisfactorily explained. The presumption of Pelliot, that, in addition to the Peshitta, the Church of the East used the canon of the Greek or Latin Church, is risky. Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. p. 212. It is much more likely that the two Byzantine delegations that reached Chang'an in 719 and 742 left their Bibles with the local Nestorians.

95 Regarding the explanations given in square brackets, see: Pelliot, Paul: *L'Inscription nestorienne de Si-Ngan-Fou*, 1996. pp. 206ff. The translation is slightly shortened.

96 Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. p. 182.

97 See pp. 133f.

98 See p. 117.

99 The *Book of Venerable Men and Sacred Books* is a mere list of venerable people, such as Moses and Paul, and of 35 books.

100 Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. p. 192.

101 Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. pp. 195ff.

102 Li, Tang: *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and its Literature in Chinese*, 2002. p. 189.

103 Eskildsen, Stephen: Christology and Soteriology in the Chinese Nestorian Texts, 2002. pp. 197f, 216f. Parallel Themes in Chinese Nestorianism and medieval Taoist Religion, 2003. pp. 8, 10ff. The thesis maintained by Saeki and Raguin that Nestorianism influenced the Taoist master Lü Dongbin, or that it lived on after 845 as a Taoist sect, is speculative. First, Lü's biography first appeared in 1742, and, second, Lü is not a historical person but rather an idealized, hypothetical figure. The obvious similarities to biblical history may presumably be traced to the third Christian mission to China, made by the Jesuits. See: Eskildsen, Stephen: Christology and Soteriology in the Chinese Nestorian Texts, 2002. pp. 197f, 209–213. Raguin, Yves: La première évangélisation de la Chine par des moines syro-orientaux aux VII et VIIIème siècles, 1998. p. 128f. Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. pp. 400–407.

104 Bowker, John (ed.): *Das Oxford-Lexikon der Weltreligionen*, 1999. p.830. See also: Foltz, Richard C.: *Religions of the Silk Road*, 1999. pp.46, 52f. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. pp.151, 320. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p.302. The hypothesis put forth by Martin Palmer, which attributes to Christian influence the depiction, beginning in China in the ninth century, of the male bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteshvara as the female Kuanyin, with one or more small children, is entirely untenable. Indian Buddhism already knew of a similar divinity; this is Hariti, whose portrayal is attested to along the Silk Road in the seventh/eighth centuries. See: Baumer, Christoph: *Die Südliche Seidenstrasse*, 2002. pp.60ff. Palmer, Martin: *The Jesus Sutras*, 2001. pp.179, 242ff.

Notes to Chapter IX

1 The languages of the Turkic peoples and the Mongols belong to the old Altaic family of languages, which includes, besides Turkic and Mongol, the Manchurian-Tungusic languages. Disagreement remains about whether the similarities between the Turkic and Mongol languages are necessarily genetic or may be explained by geographic proximity and the consequent regional mixings of peoples. Max Müller's attempt to prove a linguistic and racial commonality between the Turkic and Mongol peoples, under the name 'Turanides', was a failure. However, migrations, conquests, mixed marriages and other assimilation processes between Turkic and Mongol tribes have made it impossible to determine the origins of each. Thus it is unclear, for instance, whether the Kerait people are Turkicized Mongols or Mongolized Turks. In this spirit we use the term 'Turko-Mongol' peoples not in the genetic sense but rather the linguistic, and as the result of a complex process of assimilation. See: *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1998. Vol. 12, p. 59; 22, p. 693; 26, p. 524. Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. p. XV, 213. In order to avoid confusion, we use the terms 'Turks' and 'Turkish' only for the modern people of Asia Minor, but as an overarching term for the family of peoples, 'Turkic peoples' and 'Turkic'.

2 Bar Hebraus specifies that these converted Turks were the Kerait, Mari ibn Suleiman only speaks about Turks. Christopher Atwood argued that these Turks were the Öngüt. Atwood, Christopher: 'Historiography and transformation of ethnic identity in the Mongol Empire: the Öng'üt case', 2014. pp. 514-34.

3 Bar Hebraeus: *Chronicon ecclesiaticum*, 1872–1877. Vol. 3, pp. 280ff. *Gregorii Abulpharagii sive Bar-Hebraei Chronicon Syriacum: E codicibus Bodleianis*, 1789. p. 219. *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, 1932. Vol. I, p. 184. Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar, W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. p. 70. Mingana, A.: The early Spread of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East, 1925. pp. 308–311. See also: Hunter, Erica: The conversion of the Kerait to Christianity in AD 1007, 1991. pp. 157ff.

4 Heissig, Walther: *Religions of Mongolia*, 2000. pp. 4ff. Although the earliest sources date only from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, we can assume that the earlier religious ideas of the Turkic-Mongol peoples were similar. For discussion of whether shamanism and universal religions complement each other with regard to the levels of this world/the world to come, see: Klein, Wassilios: Regionale Koexistenzmodelle von Schamanismus und Universalreligionen in Mittelasien, Sibirien und Alaska, 2002. pp. 213ff, 225ff.

5 Mackenzie, Franklin: *Dschingis Khan*. p. 145.

6 Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. p. 193.

7 Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. p. 188.

8 Goh, Lionel: Nestorian Bronze Crosses in Hong Kong, 2003. pp. 1ff. Parry, Ken: Images in the Church of the East, 1996, plate 6.

9 Braun, Oskar: *Das Buch der Synhados oder Synodocon Orientale*, 1975. p. 346f.

10 Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. p. 59.

11 Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. p. 191. *Histoire secrète des Mongols*, 1994. p. 278.

12 Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. p. 203f. *Histoire secrète des Mongols*, 1994. pp. 95ff, 113ff. Mackenzie, Franklin: *Dschingis Khan*. pp. 87ff, 95ff.

13 Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. pp. 192f. *Histoire secrète des Mongols*, 1994. p. 278.

14 There are several different years given for Genghis Khan's birth: Mackenzie claims 1155, Neumann-Hoditz 1162, Grousset and Even 1167. See: Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. p. 199. *Histoire secrète des Mongols*, 1994. p. 262. Mackenzie, Franklin: *Dschingis Khan*. p. 32. Neumann-Hoditz, Reinhold: *Dschingis Khan*, 1985. p. 24.

15 *Histoire secrète des Mongols*, 1994. pp. 84–89, 289.

16 These peoples, evangelized to varying degrees are: the Kerait, Merkit, Naiman, Oirat, Öngüt, Tunguse and the Uigurs. A cross engraved on a rock, discovered by the author in 2002 at Arshaan Khod in north-eastern Mongolia, is remarkable insofar as the location has served as a holy place since Mesolithic times. It's located only a few kilometres from the place at the Upper Onon river where Genghis Khan held the important diet of 1206. The rocks are covered by numerous symbols and signs as well as with inscriptions in ancient Mongol, Chinese and Arabic scripts. Whether the cross is connected to Christianity remains open to debate. Furthermore, in the western Mongol province Khovd, in the district of Mönkh Khairkhan Sum, not only an engraved cross has been found on a rock but also a Syriac inscription. Atwood, Christopher P.: *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, 2004. p. 397.

17 Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926. Vol. I, pp. 226f, 238–245. See also: Bar Hebraeus: *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, 1932. Vol. I, p. 352, as well as here, pp. 211f.

18 *Histoire secrète des Mongols*, 1994. pp. 170–200.

19 *Histoire secrète des Mongols*, 1994. pp. 145, 285f. Juvaini, 'Ata-Malik: *The History of the World-Conqueror*, 1958. pp. 549–553. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. pp. 402, 405f, 416, 443.

20 Atwood, Christopher P.: *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, 2004. pp. 408, 633. Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. pp. 505f.

21 Carpini, Giovanni de Plano: *Kunde von den Mongolen, 1245–1247*, 1997. p. 117.

22 *Histoire secrète des Mongols*, 1994. pp. 48f, 69ff, 75–82, 163f. Mackenzie, Franklin: *Dschingis Khan*. pp. 27ff, 66ff, 205ff.

23 Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926. Vol. I, p. 339.

24 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 276. Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. pp. 440–443.

25 Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926. Vol. I, pp. 332–347. Das Buch der Wunder, 1999. pp. 82–85.

26 Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. p. 179.

27 Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. pp. 141ff.

28 Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. p. 285f. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. pp. 410, 419, 444. Rubruk,Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. p. 142.

29 Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. pp. 213, 227f. *Histoire secrète des Mongols*, 1994. pp. 140f, 149f. Mackenzie, Franklin: *Dschingis Khan*. p. 131.

30 Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. pp. 300ff.

31 As has been explained by Owen Lattimore and Paul Pelliot, Olon Sume was the northern capital and Tenduc, located near Hohhot, was the southern. See: Lattimore, Owen: A ruined Nestorian city in Inner Mongolia, 1934. p. 496. Pelliot, Paul: *Recherches sur les Chrétiens d'Asie Centrale et d'Extrême-Orient*, 1973. pp. 251, 255.

32 Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. p. 135f (shortened).

33 Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926. Vol. I, p. 284f, Vol. II, p. 459ff.

34 Cameron, Nigel: *Barbarians and Mandarins*, 1989. pp. 90–98. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 456f.

35 During his trip through Mongolia in 2001 and 2002 the author heard several times the accusation that Christian missionaries of various confessions tried to purchase conversions from the people with money or goods. This practice was widespread in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The same thing occurred in the Nestorian towns of Iraq and Iran. This 'buying of souls' was also practised in Islam; for instance, after the conquest of the city in 709 the inhabitants of Bukhara received two dirham for attendance at Friday prayers. MacLeod, Calum and Mayhew, Bradley: *Ousbékistan*, 2002. p. 243.

36 Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. pp. 171–176 (shortened).

37 Cameron, Nigel: *Barbarians and Mandarins*, 1989. pp. 95–101. Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. pp. 183–189.

38 Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. p. 250f (shortened).

39 Chen, Yuan: The damaged tablets discovered by Mr D. Marin in Inner Mongolia, 1938. pp. 251–254. Enoki, Kazuo: The Nestorian Christianism in China, 1964. p. 46. *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 2001. p. 88f.

40 Chen, Yuan: The damaged tablets discovered by Mr D. Marin in Inner Mongolia, 1938. p. 254f. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 473.

41 Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. p. 602. Tamcke, Martin: Coexistence and Discussion between Nestorian Christians and Shamanistic Mongolians – A Model for the Future?, 1997. p. 36. The tribe's name, Erküt, is most probably derived from the Mongolian denomination of Christians as Ärkä'ün. Atwood, Christopher P.: *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, 2004. p. 108.

42 Regarding the ruins of Olon Sume, see: Chen, Yuan: The damaged tablets discovered by Mr D. Marin in Inner Mongolia, 1938. pp. 250–256. Egami, Namio: Olon-Sume et la découverte de l'église catholique romaine de Jean de Montecorvino, 1952. pp. 155–167. Enoki, Kazuo: The Nestorian Christianism in China, 1964. pp. 45–51. Heissig, Walther: *Die mongolischen Handschriften – Restre aus Olon süme, Innere Mongolei (16.–17.Jhdt.)*, 1976. p. 3–11. Lattimore, Owen: A ruined Nestorian city in Inner Mongolia, 1934. pp. 481–497. Martin, Desmond: Preliminary report on Nestorian remains north of Kuei-Hua, Suiyüan, 1938. pp. 232–249. Pelliot, Paul: *Recherches sur les Chrétiens d'Asie Centrale et d'Extrême-Orient*, 1973. pp. 252–255.

43 The titles of the ruler of the Naiman were Turkish; however, their name, 'Naiman', meaning 'the eight' tribes, is Mongol. Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. p. 190.

44 Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. p. 190.

45 Haarmann's thesis that the verticality of the Uigur script 'developed under Syrian-Nestorian influence' is not improbable, although a Chinese influence may be assumed as well. Briquel Chatonnet, F., Debié, M. and Desreumaux, A. (eds): *Les inscriptions syriaques*, 2004. p. 23, 37–41. Haarmann, Harald: *Universalgeschichte der Schrift*, 1991. p. 508.

46 Haarmann, Harald: *Universalgeschichte der Schrift*, 1991. pp. 505–516. Mackenzie, Franklin: *Dschingis Khan*. p. 137f.

47 Foster, John: Crosses from the Walls of Zaitun, 1954. Plate XII.

48 See p. 177f.

49 Atwood, Christopher: *Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, 2004, p. 563.

50 Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. p. 105.

51 Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926. Vol. I, pp. 203–220, 274f. Marco Polo lists a total of 15 cities with Nestorian communities in Turkestan and China. See also: Mingana, A.: The early Spread

of Christianity in Central Asia and the Far East, 1925. pp. 314f.

52 Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China,* 1928. p. 137f.

53 *Histoire secrète des Mongols,* 1994. p. 224.

54 Paykova, Aza Vladimirovna: The Syrian Ostracon from Panjikant, 1979. p. 160.

55 Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. pp. 164ff. Juvaini, Ata-Malik: *The History of the World-Conqueror*, 1958. pp. 354ff.

56 Baum, Wilhelm: *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes*, 1999. pp. 110f, 124, 134f, 158f. Jackson, Peter: Prester John redivivus, 1997. pp. 425ff. See also below, pp. 211ff.

57 According to the historian Juvaini (1226–1283), Küchlüg converted to Buddhism under the influence of his wife. Juvaini, Ata-Malik: *The History of the World-Conqueror*, 1958. Vol. I, pp. 61–74. Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. pp. 233–236.

58 *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 2001. p. 75f. Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. p. 48.

59 Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. p. 288. Les inscriptions syriaques des républiques d'Asie Centrale, 2004. pp. 137.

60 Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926. Vol. I, pp. 182–187.

61 Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. pp. 55f, 206, 250f.

62 The ancient diocese of Almalik lay on the river Ili near the modern city of Yining, formerly called Kulja.

63 Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. p. 139.

64 Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. pp. 55f, 206. In 1891/1892 the French scholars de Rhins and Grenard acquired in Khotan an ancient bronze cross with Chinese inscriptions. Dutreuil de Rhins, J.-L. and Grenard, F.: *Mission scientifique dans la Haute Asie*, 1898. Vol. III, p. 134f.

65 Wessels, C.: *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia*, 1992. p. 35.

66 At the end of the fourteenth century, Almalik was completely destroyed by Tamerlane.

67 Klein, Wassilios: Syriac Writings and Turkic Language according to Central Asian Tombstone Inscriptions, 2001. p. 2. As W. Klein has investigated, about 210 to 225 gravestones have been preserved worldwide, and most are in the Hermitage in St Petersburg. Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. pp. 20f, 42, 110f, 121–124, 152–157, 215f, 219f, plates 31–41. Christliche Reliefgrabsteine des 14. Jahrhunderts von der Seidenstrasse, 1994. Les inscriptions syriaques des républiques d'Asie Centrale, 2004. pp. 130f.

68 Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. pp. 157, 264f, 288, 292.

69 Juvaini, Ata-Malik: *The History of the World-Conqueror*, 1958. Vol. I, pp. 104–177. Juvaini's numbers are most probably quite inflated. Mackenzie, Franklin: *Dschingis Khan.* pp. 234–250, 259–263, 278ff, 286, 297f. Stewart, John: *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise*, 1928. pp. 256–274.

70 Cameron, Nigel: *Barbarians and Mandarins*, 1989. pp. 95–101. Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. pp. 183–189.

71 Baum, Wilhelm: *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes*, 1999. p. 127f. Jackson, Peter: Prester John redivivus, 1997. p. 426f. Stewart, John: *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise*, 1928. p. 165f.

72 See the preceding section. Marco Polo did not believe the Nestorian prince of the Öngüt to be Prester John but rather to be his sixth successor. Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926. Vol. I, p. 284f, Vol. II, pp. 459ff. The identity of the mythical priest-king was also projected onto the Georgian king Grigori III (ruled 1156–1184), who destroyed an army of Muslim princes before the city of Ani in 1161 and 1174. Kévorkian, R.H.: *Ani, capitale de l'Arménie en l'an mil*, 2001. p. 107. When Europe had to acknowledge that John was to be found in neither Central Asia nor Mongolia, he was assumed to be in India and was connected with various rulers of Ethiopia. Finally Pope Leo named the Congolese prince Ogowe 'King John of Ethiopia, beloved in Christo'. Baum, Wilhelm: *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes*, 1999. pp. 240, 261f, 291.

73 Baum, Wilhelm: *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes*, 1999. pp. 144–152.

74 Baum, Wilhelm: *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes*, 1999. p. 152f. In light of the serious doubts about the authenticity of the travel report of the Franciscan Odorich de Pordenone (†1331), who was the last to believe that Prester John should be sought in China or Central Asia, we abstain from interpreting his travelogue. Pordenone, Odorich von: *Reise nach Indien und China: Übersetzt von Folker Reichert*, 1987. See also: Baum, Wilhelm: *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes*, 1999. pp. 197ff. Moule A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. pp. 241, 248.

75 Carpini, Giovanni de Plano: *Kunde von den Mongolen*, 1997. pp. 113, 116f. Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. pp. 257, 260.

76 Excerpts from: Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia*, 1999. p. 246. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 409.

77 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 293. Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. pp. 257, 349.

78 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 293. Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. p. 272f.

79 Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. p. 82.

80 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 293.

81 Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. pp. 348, 594.

82 Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Voyage dans L'Empire Mongol*, 1993. p. 275. Bar Hebraeus wrote that Sartaq even received the lower ordination as a deacon. Bar Hebraeus: *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, 1932. Vol. I, p. 398.

83 Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. pp. 81, 86.

84 Rubruk mentioned that in Karakorum there were a church, two mosques and twelve Buddhist temples. Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. p. 175. In 2000 a German–Mongolian team began the excavation of the city completed by Ögödei in 1235, carrying out an archaeometric survey and subsequently a test digging. Märtin, Ralf-Peter: Dschingis Khan, 2002. pp. 30ff. Mommsen, F., Jansen, F. and Renner, R.: *Geomagnetische Prospektionsmessungen in Karakorum, Mongolei*, 2000.

85 This practice contradicts the rule that only men over age 30 may be ordained as priests. The custom is understandable, given that bishops could only visit remote nomads of the steppes once every two or three decades.

86 Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. pp. 162, 170.

87 Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. pp. 183–193. *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 2001. p. 92f. See also here pp. 195f.

88 Rubruk, Wilhelm von: *Reisen zum Grosskhan der Mongolen*, 1984. p. 206.

89 Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. pp. 363ff.

90 Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. pp. 297ff.

91 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Chrétiens Syriaques sous les Mongols*, 1975. p. 10.

92 Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. p. 224f.

93 Bar Hebraeus: *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, 1932. Vol. I, p. 398. Juvaini, Ata-Malik: *The History of the World-Conqueror*, 1958. Vol. II, p. 552.

94 Baum, Wilhelm: *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes*, 1999. p. 161f. Raschid, ad-Din: *Histoire des Mongols de la Perse*, 1968. p. 95. Spuler, Bertold: *Die Mongolen in Iran*, 1955. pp. 208f, 214.

95 Ryan, James D.: Christian Wives of Mongol Khans: Tartar Queens and Missionary Expectations in Asia, 1998. pp. 416ff.

96 Hage, Wolfgang: *Untersuchungen zum Leben der Christen Zentralasiens im Mittelalter*, 1970. p. 28f. Der Weg nach Asien: Die ostsyriche Missionkircke, 1978. pp. 377, 387. Juvaini, Ata-Malik: *The History of the World-Conqueror*, 1958. Vol. I, p. 259, Vol. II, pp. 583f, 587f.

97 Juvaini, Ata-Malik: *The History of the World-Conqueror*, 1958. Vol. II, pp. 572, 605.

98 Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. pp. 360–365. Raschid ad-Din: *Histoire des Mongols de la Perse*, 1968. pp. 341–353

99 Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. p. 256.

100 See above, p. 214.

101 *Kirchenlexikon, biographisch-bibliographisches.* Vol. XX, 2002, columns 1337ff.

102 Hamilton, James: Le texte turc en caractères syriaques du grand sceau cruciforme de Mar Yahballaha III, 1972. S 163f. Hamilton, James and Niu, Ruji: Deux inscriptions funéraires turques nestoriennes de la Chine Orientale, 1994. p. 159f.

103 Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. p. 106.

104 Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. pp. 224–233. Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. pp. 508ff.

105 Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. p. 149.
106 *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 2001. p. 67.
107 Geng, Shimin, Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim and Laut, Jens: Eine neue nestorianische Grabinschrift aus China, 1996. p. 165. Yang, Qin Zhang: Nestorian Churches and their Followers among the Southern China Coast in the Yuan Dynasty, 1994. p. 108.
108 Foster, John: Crosses from the Walls of Zaitun, 1954. pp. 4, 23.
109 Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. p. 222f. Yang Qin Zhang: Nestorian Churches and their Followers among the Southern China Coast in the Yuan Dynasty, 1994. p. 110.
110 Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. p.152f. See also: Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926. Vol. II, p. 177. Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. pp. 511–516.
111 See, for example: www.keiko.com/xian/nestorians
112 Saeki, P.Y.: *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 1951. p. 444.
113 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia*, 1999. pp. 310–313. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. pp. 459–462.
114 There are at least 47 gravestones at the Quanzhou Maritime Museum, but a few are replicas; then one stone at the Quanzhou Southern Style Historical Buildings Museum and another piece (recently lost) at the Museum of the Department of Anthropology of the University of Xiamen. Gardner, Iain: The Medieval Christian Remains from Zayton, 2005. p. 215–228. The oldest tombstone from the region of Quanzhou is from 1277. Lieu, Samuel N.C.: Christian and Manichaean remains from Zayton, 2005. p. 206. Three gravestones had ben found already in the seventeenth century. Foster, John: Crosses from the Walls of Zaiton, 1954. pp. 1–5. See also: Gardner, Iain, Lieu, Samuel and Parry, Ken (eds): *From Palmyra to Zayton*, 2005. pp. 189–278, plates 3–26. Parry, Ken: Angels and Apsaras: Christian Tombstones from Quanzhou, 2003.p. 4. Wang, Lianmao: *Return to the City of Light*, 2000. pp. 99–105. Yang, Qin Zhang: Nestorian Churches and their Followers among the Southern China Coast in the Yuan Dynasty, 1994. p. 111. All the cited accounts have illustrations.
115 Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. p. 222f.
116 Lieu, Samuel N.C.: Nestorian Remains from Zaitun (Quanzhou) South China, 2003. p. 5. Klein, Wassilios: *Das nestorianische Christentum an den Handelswegen durch Kyrgyzstan bis zum 14.Jh.*, 2000. p. 223.
117 Lieu, Samuel N.C.: *Manichaeism in Central Asia and China*, 1998. p. 180. Yang, Qin Zhang: Nestorian Churches and their Followers among the Southern China Coast in the Yuan Dynasty, 1994. p. 113.
118 This report is found only in Manuscript Z of the 'Millione'. See: Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. pp. 141ff.
119 d'Ancona, Jacob: *The City of Lights*, 1997. p. 111. The English translation of the Italian manuscript was first published in 1997, and the anonymous owner of the alleged text ordered the translator not to reveal where it is kept. Without evidence to the contrary it is to be assumed that this text is a forgery.
120 Lieu, Samuel N.C.: *Manichaeism in the Later Roman Empire and Medieval China*, 1992. pp. 302ff.
121 Enoki, Kazuo: The Nestorian Christianism in China in Medieval Time according to recent historical and archaeological researches, 1964. p.57.
122 Brereton, Joel P.: 'Lotus', 1987. p. 29.
123 Foster, John: Crosses from the Walls of Zaitun, 1954. pp. 11ff, 21, plates 11, 15, 17. Franzmann, Majella et al.: A New Nestorian Tombstone from Quanzhou: Z 47, Epitaph of the Lady Kejamta, 2003. pp. 1ff. Grünwedel, Albert: *Altbuddhistische Kultstätten in Chinesisch-Turkistan*, 1912. p. 170. Hopkins, Clark: *The Discovery of Dura-Europos*, 1979. p. 220f. Le Coq, Albert von: *Von Land und Leuten in Ost-Turkistan*, 1928. p. 165, plate 43. Mohr, Gerd-Heinz: *Lexikon der Symbole: Bilder und Zeichen der christlichen Kunst*, 1982. pp. 87ff, 110. Wang, Lianmao: *Return to the City of Light*, 2000. p.112f. Yang, Qin Zhang: Nestorian Churches and their Followers among the Southern China Coast in the Yuan Dynasty, 1994. Fig. 1, 2, 6, 7. Zibawi, Mahmoud: *Koptische Kunst*, 2004. p. 46f.
124 Ecke, G. and Demiéville, P.: *The twin Pagodas of Zayton*, 1935. pp. 62, 84ff, plate 32f. Wang, Lianmao: *Return to the City of Light*, 2000. p. 136.
125 Yang, Qin Zhang: Nestorian Churches and their Followers among the Southern China Coast in the Yuan Dynasty, 1994. p. 120, fig. 6.
126 Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. p. 80f. This tombstone disappeared during the Cultural Revolution.
127 Parry, Ken: Angels and Apsaras: Christian Tombstones from Quanzhou, 2003. p. 5. Wang, Lianmao: *Return to the City of Light*, 2000. p. 114. The gravestone is a replica since the original was broken during the Cultural Revolution.
128 Foster, John: Crosses from the Walls of Zaitun, 1954. pp. 17–20, plate 17. Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. pp. 189–195.
129 Enoki, Kazuo: The Nestorian Christianism in China in Medieval Time according to recent historical and archaeological researches, 1964. p. 65, plate V.
130 Concerning the defeat of the Assassins, see: Juvaini, Ata-Malik: *The History of the World-Conqueror*, 1958. Vol. II, pp. 617–634, 713–717.
131 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Chrétiens Syriaques sous les Mongols*, 1975. pp. 5f, 11.
132 Raschid, ad-Din: *Histoire des Mongols de la Perse*, 1968. p. 283.
133 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Chrétiens Syriaques sous les Mongols*, 1975. p.29ff. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 267. Raschid, ad-Din: *Histoire des Mongols de la Perse*, 1968. pp. 379–389. Spuler, Bertold: *Die Mongolen in Iran*, 1955. pp.63f.
134 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Chrétiens Syriaques sous les Mongols*, 1975. pp. 36f, 45, 51f, 104.
135 Fiey, Jean Maurice: *Chrétiens Syriaques sous les Mongols*, 1975. p. 130. Hülägü personally stood closest to Buddhism, and for this reason had many temples built. Il-Khan Ghazan, however, ordered their total destruction in 1295/1296. This was carried out so completely that in Iran no archaeological evidence of them remains; we know of them only from the documents that catalogue their destruction. Spuler, Bertold: *Die Mongolen in Iran*, 1955. S. 180.
136 The Mongol term 'Il Khan' means 'subordinate Khan'. With this title Hülägü and his successors acknowledged the nominal authority of the Great Khan. Mostaert, Antoine and Cleaver, Francis Woodman: *Les lettres de 1289 et 1305 des ilkhan Arghun et Öljeitü à Philippe le Bel*, 1962. p. 27.
137 Bar Hebräus: *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, 1932. Vol. I, p. 490 (shortened).
138 Bar Hebräus: *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, 1932. pp. 447, 451. Le Coz Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 268.
139 Drouin, M.E.: Notice sur les Monnaies Mongoles, 1896. pp.514, 517ff, 521, 533, 543. Eti, Mehmet: *Anatolian Coins*. www.mehmeteti.150m.com. Mitchiner, Michael: *Oriental Coins and their Values: The World of Islam*, 1977. pp. 249, 323f.
140 Bar Hebräus: *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, 1932. Vol. I, pp. 446, 448, 452f, 461, 464. Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. pp. 367–371.
141 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 270. See also: Bar Hebräus: *The Chrono-graphy of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, 1932, Vol. I, pp.471ff. Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. p. 371f. Spuler, Bertold: *Die Mongolen in Iran*, 1955. pp. 182ff.
142 Bar Hebraeus: *The Chronography of Gregory Abu'l Faraj*, 1932. p. 505f.
143 Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. p. 209.
144 Hülägü, Abaqa and Arghun had built many Buddhist monasteries in Iran, which were all destroyed by Ghazan. Raschid, ad-Din: *Histoire des Mongols de la Perse*, 1968. p. 194f, 401.
145 Spuler, Bertold: *Die Mongolen in Iran*, 1955. p.220.
146 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. pp. 290, 296.
147 This crusade, undertaken together with the Kingdom of Sicily, was governed by economic considerations. See: *Histoire universelle*, 1963. Vol. 4, p. 290f.
148 Baum, Wilhelm: *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes*, 1999. pp.179ff. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia*, 1999. p. 140. Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. p. 370f.
149 See p. 219.
150 Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. S. 178. As of the ninth century not only the 'original' Mandylion was kept in Edessa but also two copies, it's unsure which version Rabban Sauma saw. Brock, Sebastian: Transformations of the Edessa Portrait of Christ, 2004. p. 50f.
151 Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. pp. 63–71, 165–197. Grousset, René: *The Empire of the Steppes*, 1970. p. 374f. Klein, Wassilios: Rabban Sauma in der Kirche der Hl. Apostel zu Konstantinopel (1287), 1995. pp. 220–233. Moule, A.C.: *Christians in China before the Year 1500*, 1977. pp. 105–115.
152 Mostaert, Antoine and Cleaver, Francis Woodman: *Les lettres de 1289 et 1305 des ilkhan Arghun et Öljeitü à Philippe le Bel*, 1962. p.18.
153 Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. p. 489.
154 Mostaert, Antoine and Cleaver, Francis Woodman: *Les lettres de 1289 et 1305 des ilkhan Arghun et Öljeitü à Philippe le Bel*, 1962. p.56f.

155 The biography of Rabban Sauma and Patriarch Mar Yahballaha III was written around 1320/1330, perhaps by the patriarch's successor, the then metropolitan of Arbil, Mar Yusip. Regarding this possibility, see: Murre-Van Den Berg, Heleen: The Church of the East in Mesopotamia in the thirteenth century, 2003. p. 11. The biography was translated by, among others: Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. Rabban's father Shiban was most probably of Öngüt, not Uigur stock. Rossabi, Morris: *Voyager from Xanadu, 2010.* pp. 23, 184n.54.
156 Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. p. 126f.
157 Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. p. 146f.
158 Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. p. 175.
159 Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. pp. 175ff (shortened).
160 Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. p. 236.
161 Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. p. 252.
162 Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. p. XXIV.
163 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. pp. 290, 305.
164 Prof. P.G. Borbone of the University of Pisa assumes that Brother Jacob had already influenced the original Arabic version. Private communication from 18 January 2004. For the Arabic text, see: Bottini, Laura: Due lettere inedite del patriarcha mar Yahballaha III (1281–1317), 1992. For its translation into French: Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. pp. 142, 298f. The Latin translation is found in: Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. pp. 97–100. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 305.
165 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 299.
166 Budge, E.A. Wallis: *The Monks of Kublai Khan, Emperor of China*, 1928. pp. 261–302.
167 Atwood, Christopher P.: *Encyclopedia of Mongolia and the Mongol Empire*, 2004. p. 108.
168 Murre-Van Den Berg, Heleen: The Patriarchs of the Church of the East from the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, 1999. p. 3f.

Notes to Chapter X

1 The term 'Tomas Christians' includes all Oriental Churches of southern India that refer back to the apostle Thomas.
2 It is not known where the metropolitan resided before the sixteenth century; perhaps in Angamali or in Cranganore (Kodungallur), but not in Patna, which is also named. Dauvillier, Jean: Les Provinces Chaldéennes «de l'Extérieur» au Moyen Age, 1948. p. 314. Mingana, A.: The Early Spread of Christianity in India, 1926. p. 65. Stewart, John: *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise*, 1928. pp. 92, 292.
3 Menachery, George and Chakkalakkal, Werner: *Kodungallur: The Cradle of Christianity in India*, 2000. p. 84.
4 Menachery, George and Chakkalakkal, Werner: *Kodungallur: The Cradle of Christianity in India*, 2000. p. 84f. Polo, Marco: 'Il Millione', 1926. Vol. II, pp. 353ff, 375f.
5 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 173. On 2 January 2005 Mar Aprem Metropolitan consecrated the new Mar Gabriel Church in Thana. *Voice of the East*, 2, 2005. p. 10.
6 The death date of Jordanus Catalani is unknown. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. pp. 173f.
7 See above, pp. 29f.
8 Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 175.
9 Baum, Wilhelm: *Die Verwandlungen des Mythos vom Reich des Priesterkönigs Johannes*, 1999. p. 284.
10 Mingana, A.: The Early Spread of Christianity in India, 1926. pp. 36–41. An East Syrian monastery stood near the grave of St Thomas, and others were existing in Angamali, Kuravilangad and Edapelle. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. p. 181.
11 Agur, C.M.: *Church History of Travancore*, 1990. pp. 32–48. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. pp. 191–199. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 337f. Menachery, George and Chakkalakkal, Werner: *Kodungallur*, 2000. pp. 68–72.
12 Agur, C.M.: *Church History of Travancore*, 1990. pp. 49–53. Kaniamparampil, Curien Corepiscopa: *The Syrian Orthodox Church in India and its Apostolic Faith*, 1989. pp. 63–77. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 339. Menachery, George and Chakkalakkal, Werner: *Kodungallur*, 2000. pp. 72ff. Mingana, A.: The Early Spread of Christianity in India, 1926. pp. 68–72.
13 Another tradition reports that Mar Ahatallah was still on a Portuguese ship in Cochin when armed Thomas Christians stormed the city to free their new bishop. Since the Portuguese wanted neither to fight the enraged Thomas Christians nor to release Mar Ahatallah, they drowned him. Agur, C.M.: *Church History of Travancore*, 1990. p. 55f. Other authors believe that Mar Ahatallah belonged to the Syrian Orthodox Church, or even was identical to their patriarch Mar Ignatius. Kaniamparampil, Curien Corepiscopa: *The Syrian Orthodox Church in India and its Apostolic Faith*, 1989. pp. 80–87. Mingana, A.: The Early Spread of Christianity in India, 1926. pp. 46f, 51f.
14 Agur, C.M.: *Church History of Travancore*, 1990. pp. 58–61. Kaniamparampil, Curien Corepiscopa: *The Syrian Orthodox Church in India and its Apostolic Faith*, 1989. pp. 89–95.
15 Agur, C.M.: *Church History of Travancore*, 1990. p. 66. Other authors believe Simon belonged to the Chaldean Church. Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. p. 50.
16 Mar Gabriel's confession is also debated. Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. p. 50.
17 Mar Aprem, Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. p. 50f. Mar Johannis's opponents characterized him as a conman. Agur, C.M.: *Church History of Travancore*, 1990. p. 71f.
18 Such massacres of Christians were carried out by Sultan Tippu of Mysore (ruled 1782–1799), as well as later in 1809, 1829 and 1858. Agur C.M.: *Church History of Travancore*, 1990. pp. 56ff, 536. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 321. Stewart, John: *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise*, 1928. pp. 231, 312.
19 Personal conversation of Patriarch Mar Chrystosom Thoma (in office 1999-2007) with the author on 8 January 2001.
20 Joy, K.T.: *The Mar Thoma Church: Heritage and Mission*, 1986. pp. 77–92. Mar Thoma Alexander Metropolitan: *The Mar Thoma Church*, 1985. pp. 49–52.
21 Chaillot, Christine: *The Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East*, 1998. p. 70. Kaniamparampil, Curien Corepiscopa: *The Syrian Orthodox Church in India and its Apostolic Faith*, 1989. pp. 160–251.
22 Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. pp. 78f. Valognes, Jean-Pierre: *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 1994. p. 448f.
23 Mar Aprem, Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. pp. 117–119, 152–156, 168.
24 Mar Aprem, Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. pp. 168ff, 177f, 189f.
25 Tharakam, Anniyl: Die Gründung der christlichen syro-malankarischen Kultur von Kerala, 2001. p. 54.
26 Charismatic movements are also found among Catholic groups.
27 Perkins, Justin: *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia among the Nestorian Christians*, 1843. p. 357.

Notes to Chapter XI

1 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 327.
2 Murre-Van Den Berg and Brock strongly believe that there was no Mar Shimun VIII, but instead that Shimun VII did not die in 1551 but rather lived until 1558, whereupon his brother Elias VI bar Giwargis succeeded him. In this case the Sulaqa initiative was not the expression of a conflict about succession, but a revolt against a ruling Patriarch. Brock, Sebastian: letter to the author dated 29 October 2005. Murre-Van Den Berg, Heleen: The Patriarchs of the Church of the East from the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, 1999. p. 5f. Wilmshurst, David: *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318–1913*, 2000. p. 22.
3 The pallium is a white woollen band with two pendants, marked with six black crosses. It is worn over the mass vestments and is permitted only to archbishops.
4 Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. p. 108. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 328f. Murre-Van Den Berg, Heleen: The Patriarchs of the Church of the East from the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, 1999. pp. 10–15.
5 The Catholic missionaries active in the Ottoman Empire could, of course, convert only other Christians and Jews, never Muslims. As in south-western India, Catholic missionary activity

resulted in a weakening of the traditional Church structure.

6 Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. p. 109.

7 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 333f. Murre-Van Den Berg, Heleen: The Patriarchs of the Church of the East from the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, 1999. pp. 8ff.

8 Murre-Van Den Berg, Heleen: The Patriarchs of the Church of the East from the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, 1999. p. 16.

9 The Chaldean patriarchs lived in Mosul until the end of World War II, and then in Baghdad. The official title 'patriarch of Babylon'. is based on a sixteenth-century error, in which Baghdad was equated with Babylon.

10 Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *Western Missions among Assyrians*, 1982. p. 21.

11 This view is not shared by the Church of the East. See: Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. pp.37ff.

12 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. pp. 357.

13 Badger, George Percy: *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 1987. Vol. II, pp. 12f.

14 Grant, Asahel: *The Nestorians; or the Lost Tribes*, 1841. p. 70.

15 Bishop, Isabella: *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, 1891. Vol. 2, pp. 314f (shortened).

16 Badger, George Percy: *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 1987. Vol. I, pp. 256–262.

17 Vine, Aubrey: *The Nestorian Churches*, 1937. pp.177f.

18 Grant, Asahel: *The Nestorians; or the Lost Tribes*, 1841. p. 101. Perkins, Justin: *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia among the Nestorian Christians*, 1843. p. 25.

19 Perkins, Justin: *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia among the Nestorian Christians*, 1843. p. 25.

20 Perkins, Justin: *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia among the Nestorian Christians*, 1843. p. 31 (shortened).

21 Perkins, Justin: *A residence of Eight years in Persia among the Nestorian Christians*, 1843. p. 21.

22 Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *Western Missions among Assyrians*, 1982. p. 31.

23 Badger, George Percy: *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 1987. Vol. I, pp. 186, 279. Perkins, Justin: *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia among the Nestorian Christians*, 1843. pp. 22f, 162ff, 278, 303.

24 Perkins, Justin: *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia among the Nestorian Christians*, 1843. p. 301f.

25 Grant, Asahel: *The Nestorians; or the Lost Tribes, 1841.* pp. IV, 118ff.

26 Joseph, John: *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 1961. p. 64.

27 Layard, Austin Henry: *Populärer Bericht über die Ausgrabungen zu Niniveh: Nebst Beschreibung eines Besuchs bei den chaldäischen Christen in Kurdistan und den Yezidi oder Teufelsanbetern*, 1852. p. 106.

28 Badger, George Percy: *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 1987. Vol. I, pp. 270–274, 303f. Joseph, John: *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 1961. pp. 48, 61–64. Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *Western Missions among Assyrians*, 1982. pp. 41–45. A description of the massacre of the mountain Nestorians is also found in Karl May's novel *Through wild Kurdistan.* May, Karl: *Durchs wilde Kurdistan*, 1951. pp. 248–274.

29 Badger, George Percy: *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 1987. Vol. I, pp. 24, 380.

30 Valognes, Jean-Pierre: *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 1994. pp. 417, 742.

31 Perkins, Justin: *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia among the Nestorian Christians*, 1843. p. 254 (shortened).

32 Badger, George Percy: *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 1987. Vol. I, p. 367. Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *Western Missions among Assyrians*, 1982. pp. 45ff.

33 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 356.

34 Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *Western Missions among Assyrians*, 1982. pp. 59–63.

35 Badger, George Percy: *The Nestorians and their Rituals*, 1987. Vol. I, pp. 242f, 248ff. Badger was recalled from Kurdistan in 1844, although the patriarch appealed in writing to the Archbishop of Canterbury for him to remain. After stays in Mumbai and Aden, he returned to Mosul in 1850 to purchase ancient manuscripts. Op. cit. pp. 286–296, 378–389.

36 Bishop, Isabella: *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, 1891. Vol. 2, p. 230 (shortened).

37 Bishop, Isabella: *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, 1891. Vol. 2, p. 295.

38 Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. p. 113.

39 Then Archbishop Edward Benson (in office 1883–1896) invented the phrase 'The Mission of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Assyrian Christians'. Bishop, Isabella: *Journeys in Persia and Kurdistan*, 1891. Vol. 2, p. 237f.

40 Herodotus (c. 480–420 BCE) had already written of some troops in Xerxes's army: 'This people, whom the Greeks call Syrians, are called Assyrians by the barbarians.' Aprim, Frederick A: *Assyrians: The Continuous Saga*, 2004. p. 112. Then there are early examples in which an important Nestorian prelate referred to himself as 'from Assyria.' Thus, in 585 an Archdeacon Mar Awa signed the synodal decisions as 'representative of the metropolitan of Aturaya', – that is, Assyria. The metropolitan see of Nisibis also bore the additional name 'see of Assyria'. Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. p. 155. That the Christians of Adiabene were also called Assyrians was known in Europe more than two centuries before the missionaries of the nineteenth century. In a letter to Patriarch Shimun, dated 29 June 1617, Pope Paul V wrote: 'Honoured brother Shimun the Patriarch of the Eastern Assyrians.' Aprim, Frederick A: *Assyrians*, 2004. p. 165. On this topic also refer to: Gewargis, Odisho Malko: We are Assyrians, 2002. pp. 77–95. Grant, Asahel: *The Nestorians; or the Lost Tribes*, 1841. pp. 165ff. Joseph, John: *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 1961. pp. 13–21. Layard, Austin Henry: *Populärer Bericht über die Ausgrabungen zu Niniveh*, 1852. pp. 98, 115. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 394. Odisho, Edward: The Ethnic, Linguistic and Cultural Identity of Modern Assyrians, 2003. pp. 5–18. 26 Perkins, Justin: *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia among the Nestorian Christians*, 1843. p. 175. Vine, Aubrey: *The Nestorian Churches*, 1937. pp. 179f.

41 Joseph, John: *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 1961. p. 99 (shortened).

42 Lorieux, Claude: *Chrétiens d'Orient en terres d'islam*, 2001. p. 79f.

43 Joseph, John: *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 1961. p. 122f.

44 Joseph, John: *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 1961. p. 123.

45 The union was never completed. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 360. Wigram, W.A.: *The Assyrians and their Neighbours*, 1929. p. 176.

46 Under the overarching term 'Assyro-Chaldeans' one sometimes places members of the Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church.

47 Lorieux, Claude: *Chrétiens d'Orient en terres d'islam*, 2001. p. 81.

48 Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. p. 121.

49 The date of 3 March 1918, sometimes found in the literature, refers to the Julian calendar.

50 Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. p. 122. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 368. Joseph, John: *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 1961. p. 140. Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. p. 109.

51 Joseph, John: *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 1961. pp. 140ff, 156. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. pp. 368f. Valognes, Jean-Pierre: *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 1994. pp. 742f.

52 Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. 122. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 368f. Valognes, Jean-Pierre: *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 1994. p. 742. Vine, Aubrey: *The Nestorian Churches,* 1937. p. 198. Wigram, W.A.: *The Assyrians and their Neighbours*, 1929. pp. 217f. Ye'or, Bat: *Der Niedergang des orientalischen Christentums unter dem Islam*, 2002. pp. 219–222.

53 With regard to the Russian Orthodox Assyrians, in 1917 some 15,000 of them emigrated to the Russian Caucasus; the remainder were either murdered in the late summer of 1918 or fled to Iraq, where they converted back to the Church of the East.

54 Before 1940 Mar Shimun changed his numerical designation from Shimun XXI to Shimun XXIII. The two additional patriarchs called Shimun are the apostle Simon Peter and another patriarch from between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. See: Coakley, J.F. and Parry, K. (eds): The Church of the East: Life and Thought, 1996. p. 181.

55 Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. pp. 130–133.

56 The Hashemites are an Arab ruling dynasty, originally from Mecca and Medina, whose tribal lineage goes back to the Prophet Mohammed.

57 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1998. Vol. 11, p. 454. The secret agreement was implemented with two exceptions: France relinquished southern Anatolia to Turkey and Mosul to Great Britain.

58 Although the Treaty of Sèvres, concluded with Turkey in 1920, granted the Armenians a national state, the Allies stood idly by when a newly fortified Turkey attacked the Armenian Republic. The independent Kurdish state likewise envisaged by the treaty was never realized.

59 Joseph, John: *The Nestorians and their Muslim*

Neighbors, 1961. pp. 160ff.
60 Joseph, John: *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 1961. pp. 176–182.
61 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 374.
62 Joseph, John: *The Nestorians and their Muslim Neighbors*, 1961. pp. 203ff. Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. pp. 159–164. Valognes, Jean-Pierre: *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 1994. p. 745f.
63 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 376. Valognes, Jean-Pierre: *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 1994. p. 746.
64 Aprim, Frederick A.: *Indigenous People in Distress*. 2003. p. 4. Assyrian Levies R.A.F.: *A war Diary – the Battle of Habbaniya*, no date.
65 See also: Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 1992. pp. 503ff.
66 Landron, Bénédicte: *Chrétiens et Musulmans en Irak*, 1994. p. 164.

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2 The Forgotten Assyrian Martyr, His Holiness the late Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII.
3 Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 393.
4 *Zinda*, 9 November 2005. See pp. 288f.
5 Coakley, J.F.: The Church of the East since 1914, 1996. pp. 191ff. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. p. 392f. Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. pp. 169f, 177ff.
6 Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *Western Missions among Assyrians*, 1982. p. 142.
7 *From the public records of the trial proceeding of the assassination of His Holiness Mar Eshai Shimun XXIII*, 2000. Coakley, J.F.: The Church of the East since 1914, 1996. pp. 194 ff. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. pp. 393ff. Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. pp. 169f, 182ff.
8 See below the section 'Ecumenical dialogue'. As of April 2016. the Common Statement on Sacramental Life had still not been ratified.
9 Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. p. 193. The two Churches also celebrated the millennium together in Iraq.
10 Coakley, J.F.: The Church of the East since 1914, 1996. p. 196.
11 As of November 2005.
12 *Zinda*, 9 September 2002.
13 Chevalier, Michel: *Les Montagnards Chrétiens du Hakkari et du Kurdistan Septentrional*, 1985. p. 245. Information from Mr Nicolas Aljeloo, Sydney, Australia on 25 January 2003.
14 Conversation with the author on 2 June 2001.
15 Valognes, Jean-Pierre: *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 1994. pp. 748–751.
16 Thanks to this state-ordered 'toleration', it was possible for the Christians in Iraq to restore or rebuild their churches without problems, which would be unthinkable in the states of the Arabian Peninsula or in Egypt.
17 Aprim, Frederick A.: *Indigenous People in Distress*, 2003. pp. 1–34.
18 Habbi, Yusuf: *Les Chrétiens en Irak*, c. 2000. pp. 1, 5.
19 Female Christian professors and students are often the victims of violence, so at least 1500 Christian students have abandoned their studies and teachers have left Iraq.
20 The poor Christians living in Shi'ite or Sunni areas try to flee to the region controlled by the Kurdistan Regional Government.
21 Interview with Archbishop Louis Sako. *Tages Anzeiger Zurich*, 27 October 2004, p. 10.
22 Valognes, Jean-Pierre: *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 1994. p. 788.
23 Valognes, Jean-Pierre: *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 1994. pp. 784, 791.
24 Lorieux, Claude: *Chrétiens d'Orient en terres d'islam*, 2001. pp. 276–280. Valognes, Jean-Pierre: *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 1994. p. 793. *Payvand's Iran News*, 29 December 2003. www.payvand.com/news/03/dec/1211.
25 Aprim, Frederick A.: *Indigenous People in Distress*, 2003. pp. 36f. Officially, Turkey consistently denies the existence of inconvenient citizens, as in the official jargon Kurds are called 'mountain Turks' and Christian Assyrians 'Turko-Semites' or 'semitic Turks'. Aljeloo, Nicholas: Who are the Assyrians?, 2000. p. 11. Aprim, Frederick A.: *Indigenous People in Distress*, 2003. p. 35.
26 *Information Christlicher Orient*. Linz 15/2004. p. 15.
27 These four patriarchates are the Syrian Orthodox, the Syrian Catholic, the Melkite Greek Catholic and the Greek Orthodox patriarchate of Antioch.
28 These communities are Sunnis, Twelver Shi'ites, Ismailites, Druzes, Alawis, Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Nestorian Assyrians, Chaldeans, Armenians, Armenian Catholics, Melkites, Maronites, Roman Catholics, various Protestants, Jews and Mandeans.
29 Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. pp. 135f. Valognes Jean-Pierre: *Vie et mort des Chrétiens d'Orient*, 1994. p. 838.
30 Conversation with the author on 2 June 2001.
31 Conversation with the author on 2 June 2001.
32 Mar Odisho spoke of the Church of the East, the Syrian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. pp. 33ff.
33 Mérigoux, Jean-Marie: *Va à Ninive!*, 2000. pp. 374, 390, 408.
34 www.cired.org. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_11111994_assyrian-church_en.html. *The Messenger*, 31 March 1995. pp. 7–10.
35 Brock, Sebastian et al.: *The Hidden Pearl*, 2001. Vol. 3, p. 31.
36 *The Messenger*, 31 March 1995. pp. 11ff.
37 *The Messenger*, 31 March 1995. p. 14.
38 Joint Patriarchal Statement, 1996. www.cin.org.
39 Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. pp. 240–245.
40 *Pastoral Guidelines for Admission to the Eucharist between the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church*. 2001. www.cired.org. www.mliles.com. www.katolsk.no
41 See p. 288.
42 *Zinda*, 24 December 2003.
43 Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. pp. 211–215. Mar Bawai Soro: *The Person and Teachings of Nestorius of Constantinople with a special reference to his Condemnation at the Council of Ephesus*, 1997. p. 27.
44 Concerning the latest position of the Coptic Church towards the Assyrian Church of the East: Bishoy, Amba, Metropolitan Bishop of Damiette: *The View of the Coptic Orthodox Church concerning Theodore of Mopsuestia and Nestorius of Constantinople*, 2000. *Christological controversies in the fourth and fifth centuries*. 2001. *Interpretation of Christological agreements*, 2004. www.coptychhymns.net. Mar Aprem Metropolitan: *The Assyrian Church of the East in the Twentieth Century*, 2003. pp. 211–215.
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47 Conversation with the author on 2 June 2001.

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2 http://www.exploration-eurasia.com/EurAsia/inhalt_english/frameset_projekt_7.html
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16 These two paragraphs are based on information kindly supplied to the author by Mar Awa Royel, Bishop of California, via Susan Koshaba, early April 2016. Any mistakes or inaccuracies are entirely mine.

17 See table p. 333.

18 See pp. 270f.

19 See p. 275.

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21 *Guardian*, dated 24 July 2014: http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/24/iraqi-christians-mosul-isis-convert-islam-or-be-executed.

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Annexes

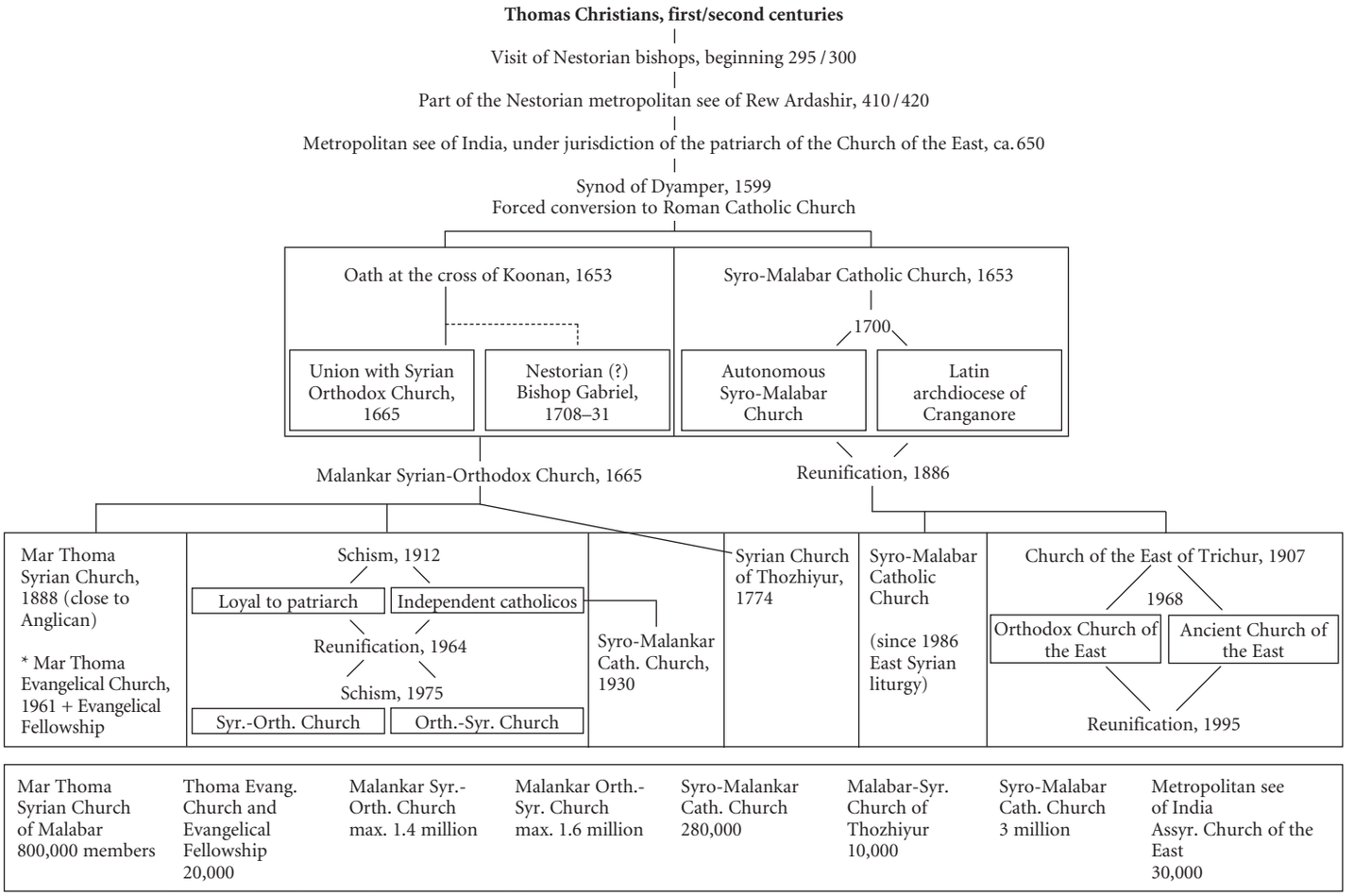
The most important Eastern churches

Roman Imperial Church, until 431 / 433

Byzantine imperial church	Dyophysites	Thomas Christians	Miaphysites	
	Assyrian Church of the East (Nestorians)		Syrian-Orthodox Church (Jacobites)	Coptic Orth. Church
Maronite Church, 7th century		Nestorian metropolitan see of Rew Ardashir, 410 / 420	Syrian Cath. Church, 1781	Copt. Cath. Church, 1741, 1895
Orthodox ecumenical patriarchate of Constantinople, 1054 / 1204 plus 15 autocephalous orth. churches		Nestorian metropolitan see of India, c. 650		Ethiopian Orth. Church
				Ethiopian Catholic Church, 1930
				Armenian Apost. Church
Eastern Catholic churches	Chaldean Cath. Church, 1553	see the following overview of the oriental churches of India		Armenian Catholic Church, 1740
Roman Cath. Church (1054 / 1204)	Protestant Assyrian churches, nineteenth/twentieth centuries			
Protestant churches, from sixteenth century	Ancient Church of the East, 1968			

Sources: *Welt und Umwelt der Bibel*. Sonderheft Seidenstrasse, 2002. p. 89. Winkler, Dietmar W. and Augustin, Klaus: *Die Ostkirchen*, 1997.

The oriental churches of India



Source: Cannuyer, Christian: Vingt siècles de Christianisme en Inde méridionale, 2004. p. 11.

Patriarchs of the Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church

Church tradition [1]
Apostle Thomas (†73)
Addai (37–65)
Aggai (66–87)
Mari (88–120)
Abris (121–137)
Abraham I (159–171)
James I (172–190)
Ahadabui (202–220) [2]
Schalupa (220–240)
Vacant (240–285/291)

Line of Seleucia-Ctesiphon
Papa bar-Aggai (285/291–c. 327) [3]
Shimun I (329–341)
Sahdost (341–342)
Barbahemin (343–346)
Vacant (346–363 or 399)
Tomarsa (363–371)
Qayyuma (377–399) [4]
Isaac I (399–410)
Ahai (410–414)
Yahballaha I. (415–420)
Ma'na (420)
Faraboht (421)
Dadisho I (421–456)
Babowei (457–484)
Acacius (485–496)
Babai (497–502)
Silas (503–523)
Patriarchal schism (524–539)
Narses (524–535)
Elisha (524–539)
Paul I (539)
Aba I the Great (540–552)
Joseph (552–567)
Ezekiel (570–582)
Ishoyahb I (582–596)
Sabrisho I (596–604)
Gregory I (605–608)
Vacant (608–628)
Ishoyahb II (628–646)
Maremmeh (646–650)
Ishoyahb III (650–660)
Giwargis I (661–680)
John I Bar Marta (680–683)
Henanisho I (685–700)
Anti-patriarch John the Leper (692–693)
Vacant (700–714)
Saliba-Zakha (714–728)
Pethion (731–740)
Aba II (741–751)
Sourin (754)
James II (754–775)
Henanisho II (775–780)

Baghdad
Timothy I (780–823)
Isho Bar Nun (823–828)
Giwargis II (828–831)
Sabrisho II (831–835)
Abraham II (837–850)
Theodosius I (853–858)
Sergius I (860–872)
Israel of Kashkar (not consecrated, 877)
Enos I (877–884)
John II (884–892)
John III (893–899)
John IV 900–905)
Abraham III (906–937)
Emmanuel I (937–960)
Israel I (961)
Abdisho I (963–986)
Mari II (987–999)
John V (1000–1011)
John VI (1012–1016)
Ishoyahb IV (1020–1025)
Elias I (1028–1049)
John VII (1049–1057)
Sabrisho III (1064–1072)
Abdisho II (1074–1090)
Makika I (1092–1110)
Elias II (1111–1134)
Barsauma I (1134–1136)
Abdisho III (1138–1148)
Ishoyahb V (1149–1175)
Elias III (1176–1190)
Yahbhallah II (1190–1222)
Sabrisho IV (1222–1224)
Sabrisho V (1226–1256)
Makika II (1257–1265)
Dinkha I (1265–1281)

Maragha
Yahbhallah III (1281–1317)

Arbil
Timothy II (1318–1332)

Karamlis
Dinkha II (1332–1364)

Mosul
Shimun II ?
Shimun III ?
Elias IV († 1437)

Jezireh
Shimun IV (1437–1497)
Shimun V (1497–1501)
Elias V (1502–1503)

Rabban Hormizd
Shimun VI (1504–1538)
Shimun VII (1538–1551) [5]

In 1553 the Church of the East split because John Sulaqa had himself appointed patriarch of the Chaldean Catholic Church. The Catholic patriarchate of Amida was established in 1681. In 1968 the Old Assyrian Church of the East broke away.

Line of Seleucia-Ctesiphon	Line of John Sulaqa	Line of Amida (Diyarbakir)	Ancient Church of the East
Shimun VIII (1551–1558)	John VIII Sulaqa* (1553–1555)		
Elias VI (1558–1591)	Abdisho IV* (1555–1570)		
EliasVII*** (1591–1617)	Abraham* (1570–1577)		
Elias VIII*** (1617–1660)	Yahballah IV** (1577–1580)		
Elias IX*** (1660–1700)	Shimun IX* (1580–1600)	Joseph I* (1681–1696)	
Elias X (1700–1722)	Shimun X** (1600–1638)	Joseph II* (1696–1712)	
Elias XI*** (1722–1778)	Shimun XI** (1638–1656)	Joseph III* (1714–1757)	
Elias XII*** (1778–1804)	Shimun XII** (1656–1662)	Joseph IV* (1759–1781)	
John VIII* Hormez (1830–1838); previously archbishop of Mosul (1778–1830)	Shimun XIII** (1662–1700); dissolved the union with Rome (in 1672)	Joseph V** (1781–1828)	
Nicholas I* (1840–1847)	Shimun XIV (1700–1740)		
Joseph VI* (1848–1878)	Shimun XV (1740–1780)		
Elias XIII* (1879–1894)	Shimun XVI (1780–1820)		
Abdisho V* (1895–1899)	Shimun XVII (1820–1861)		
Joseph Emmanuel II* (1900–1947)	Shimun XVIII (1861–1903)		
Joseph VII* (1947–1958)	Shimun XIX (1903–1918)		
Paul II* (1958–1989)	Shimun XX (1918–1920)		
Raphael I* (1989–2003)	Shimun XXI (1920–1975); called himself Shimun XXIII beginning c. 1940		Thoma Darmo (1968–1969)
Emmanuel III* (2003-2012)	Dinkha IV (1976-2015)		Addai II (since 1969)
Louis Raphael I* (since 2013)	Giwargis III (since 2015)		

* recognized by Rome ** did not receive the pallium *** engaged in negotiations with Rome, without result

The following sources were consulted: Baum, Wilhelm and Winkler, Dietmar W.: *Die Apostolische Kirche des Ostens*, 2000. pp. 151f. Chaldeans on Line: list of all the Patriarchs of the Church of the East. *Chronique de l'Église d'Adiabène sous les Parthes et les Sassanides par Msiha-Zkha.* sixth century, 1907. Gillman, Ian and Klimkeit, Hans-Joachim: *Christians in Asia before 1500*, 1999. pp. 358f. Le Coz, Raymond: *Histoire de l'Église d'Orient*, 1995. pp. 417–424. Mar Odisho Metropolitan: *The Book of Marganitha (The Pearl) on the Truth of Christianity*, 1988. pp. 109–113. Moffett, Samuel Hugh: *A History of Christianity in Asia.* Vol. I. *Beginnings to 1500.* 1992. Murre-Van Den Berg, Heleen: The Patriarchs of the Church of the East from the Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries, 1999. Wilmshurst, David: *The Ecclesiastical Organisation of the Church of the East, 1318–1913*, 2000. pp. 16–37.

Notes to list of patriarchs

1 The first nine patriarchs are listed by both the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean Church. They cannot be historically verified; we have taken the dates from these two lists.
2 According to the Chronicle of Arbil, Ahadabui and Schalupa were not patriarchs but rather bishops of Adiabene. Schalupa (258–273 as per the Chronicle) is said to have ordained Papa bar-Aggai as priest and Ahadabui (273–291 as per the Chronicle) as bishop. *Chronique de l'Église d'Adiabène sous les Parthes et les Sassanides par Msiha-Zkha.* sixth century, 1907. p. 111.
3 Papa bar-Aggai is the first historically verified bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon; in 315 he claimed primacy for his diocese.
4 The bishops Tomarsa (363–371) and Qayyuma (377–399) are disputed. See Chapter V, note 43.
5 See p. 305, note 2 to Chapter XI.

The Sassanian Dynasty (224–651)

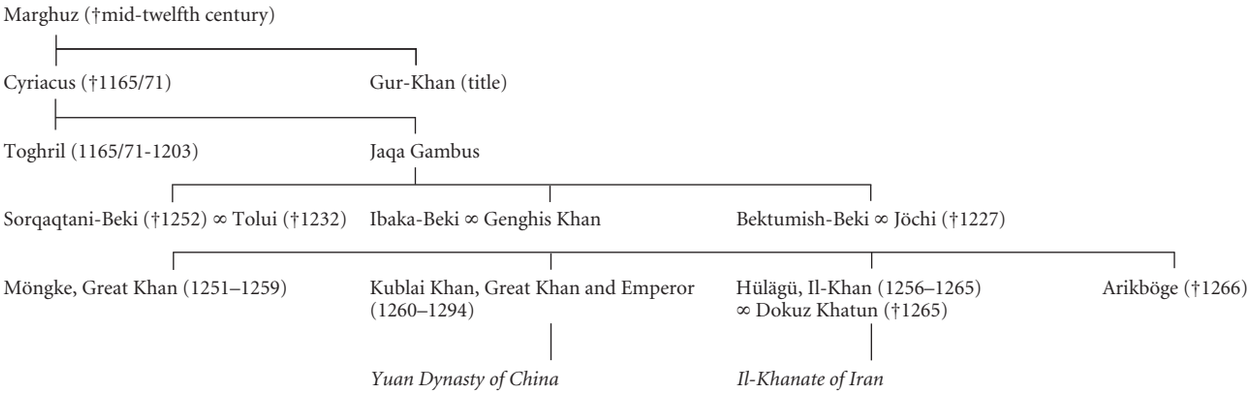
Ardashir I (224–240/241)
Shapur I (240/241–272)
Hormizd I (272–273)
Vahram I (273–276)
Vahram II (276–293)
Vahram III (293)
Narses (293–302)
Hormizd II (302–309)
Shapur II (309–379)
Ardashir II (379–383)
Shapur III (383–388)
Vahram IV (388–399)
Yazdgerd I (399–420)
Vahram V (421–438)
Yazgdgerd II (438–457)
Hormizd III (457–459)
Piroz I (459–484)
Balash (484–488)
Kawad I (488–531)
Djamasp (usurper, 496–498)
Chosrau I (531–579)
Hormizd IV (579–590)
Vahram Chobin (usurper, 590–591)
Chosrau II (590–628)
Period of rapid changes in rulers (628–632), including, among others:
  Kavad II (628)
  Ardashir III (628–629)
  Boran (630–631)
  Hormizd V (631–632)
Yazdgerd III (632–651)
Living in exile in China:
  Piroz II (†679)
  Piroz III (†707)

Arab and Muslim dynasties

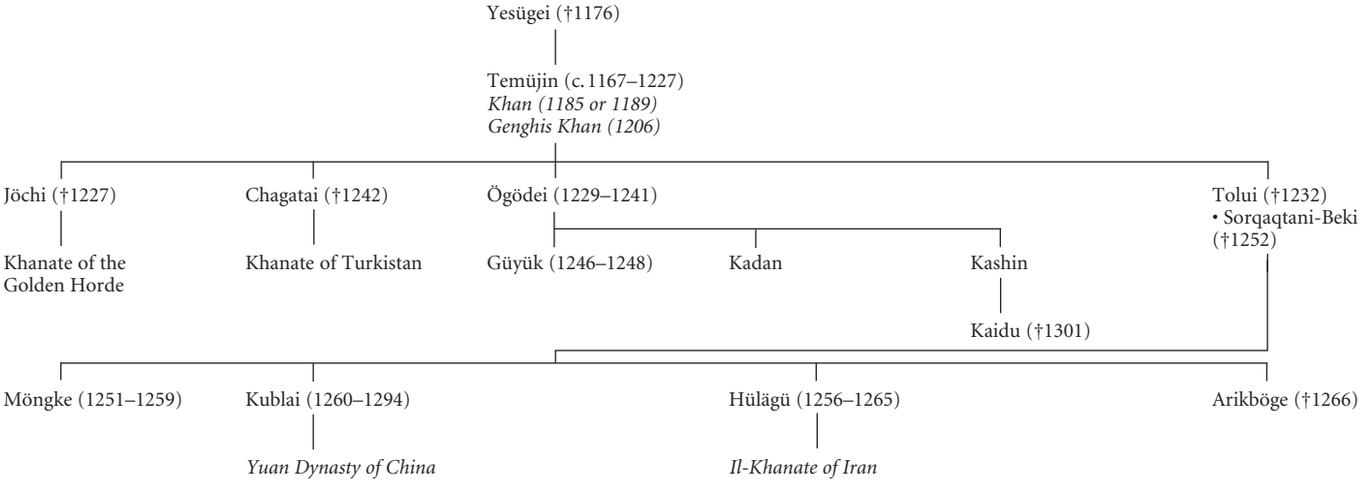
The four rightly guided caliphs (632–661)
  Abu Bakr (632–634)
  Omar (634–644)
  Uthman (644–656)
  Ali (656–661)
The Umayyads (661–750)
  Muawiya I (661–680)
  Yazid I (680–683)
  Muawiya II (683–684)
  Marwan I (684–685)
  Abd el-Malik (685–705)
  Walid I (705–715)
  Sulaiman (715–717)
  Omar II (717–720)
  Yazid II (720–724)
  Hisham (724–743)
  Walid II (743–744)
  Yazid III (744)
  Ibrahim (744)
  Marwan II (744–750)
The Abbasids (750–1258)
  Abu al-Abbas (750–754)
  Al-Mansur (754–775)
  Al-Mahdi (775–785)
  Al-Hadi (785–786)
  Harun ar-Rashid (786–809)
  Al-Amin (809–813)
  Al-Ma'mun (813–833)
  Al-Mu'tasim (833–842)
  Al-Wathiq (842–846)
  Al-Mutawakkil (847–861)

After 861 the caliphate became less important; the last Abbasid caliph, Al-Mustasim, died in 1258. In Mesopotamia political power passed to foreign dynasties, such as the Buyids (945–1055), the Seljuks (1055–1194) and the Zangids (1127–1222); local dynasties ruled in Iran.

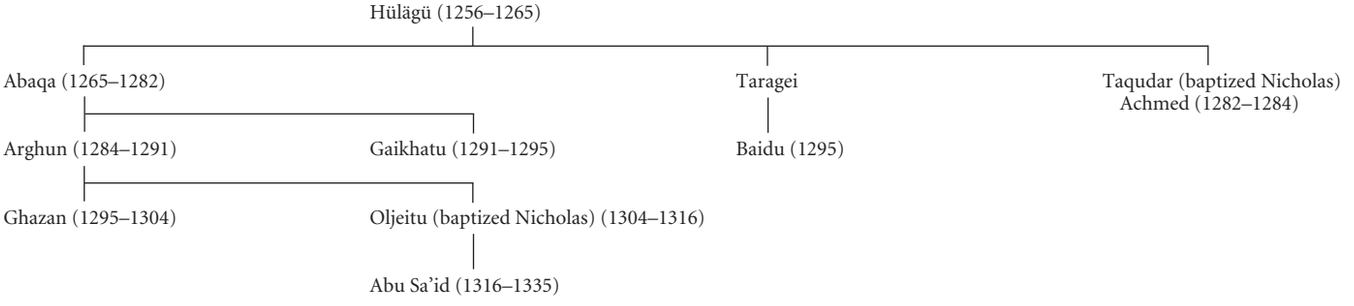
The House of Toghril, Khan of the Kerait
(The years of reign are given where applicable)



The House of Genghis Khan
(The years of reign are given where applicable)



The Il-Khans of Iran
(The years of reign are given where applicable)



The Archdioceses and Dioceses of the Assyrian Church of the East in 2016	
Archdiosese	
1. India	Covers India and the Arabian/Persian Gulf countries
2. Iraq and Russia	Covers the indigenous territory of the Church in Iraq, including the cities and surroundings of Baghdad, Basra, Kirkuk, and Mosul, then the Kurdistan Region, Russia, Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia
3. Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon	Established in October 1984. It covers Australia, New Zealand and the administration of the Diocese of Lebanon
Dioceses	
1.Syria	Jurisdiction lies throughout Syria, particularly in the al-Hasakah governorate with al-Hasakah, Qamishli and the thirty-five villages along the Khabur River. There are also small communities in Damascus and Aleppo
2. Iran	Territory includes the capital Tehran, the Urmia and Salmas plains
3. Nohadra and Russia	Established in 1999, includes the indigenous communities of Dohuk, Kurdistan Region, along with the Russian Federation
4. Europe	This includes in Western Europe Denmark, Sweden, Great Britain, Germany, The Netherlands, France, Belgium, Austria, Finland, Norway and Greece
5. Eastern USA	Formerly the Patriarchal Archdiocese from 1994 until 2012. The territory includes the large Illinois community, along with parishes in Michigan, New England, New York, Washington D.C. and Florida
6. California USA	Jurisdiction includes parishes in Western USA and central/northern California. Key parishes are San Francisco, San Jose, Modesto, Turlock, Ceres, Seattle and Sacramento
7. Western USA	Jurisdiction includes parishes in Arizona and southern California, missions in Texas, Arizona and Nevada
8. Canada	Includes the territory of Toronto, Windsor, Hamilton, Vancouver and all Canada

The Holy Synod as per April 2016	
Mar Giwargis III (Sliwa)	121st Catholicos-Patriarch (see of Seleucia-Ctesiphon; personal diocese is Erbil)
Mar Aprem Mooken	Metropolitan of Malabar and All India
Mar Meelis Zaia	Metropolitan of Australia, New Zealand and Lebanon
Mar Yosip Sargis	Bishop Emeritus of Baghdad (living in retirement in California)
Mar Isaac Yousif	Bishop of Dohuk and Russia, patriarchal vicar in Iraq
Mar Aprem Nathniel	Bishop of Syria
Mar Narsai Benyamin	Bishop of Iran
Mar Aprim Khamis	Bishop of Western United States
Mar Emmanuel Yosip	Bishop of Canada
Mar Odisho Oraham	Bishop of Europe
Mar Awa Royel	Bishop of California and Secretary of the Holy Synod
Mar Paulus Benjamin	Bishop of Eastern United States
Mar Yohannan Joseph	Auxiliary Bishop of India
Mar Awgin Kuriakose	Auxiliary Bishop of India

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Patriarchate
Metropolitan See
Christian community
Place
Trading routes (Silk Roads)
0 50 100 150 200km

37
41
45
49
38
34
30

GEORGIA
ARMENIA
AZERBAIJAN
HAKKARI
TUR ABDIN
KURDISTAN
MARAGHA
MESOPOTAMIA
TAGHLIB
ADIABENE

Euphrates
Kızıl Irmak
Murat
Aras
Seyhan
Khabur
Upper Zab
Lower Zab
Tigris
Diyala
Jordan
Ab-i-Diz
Karun

Caspian Sea
Lake Van
Lake Urmiah
Mediterranean Sea
Persian Gulf

Barda
Erzerum
St. Thaddeus
Caesarea
Melitene
Maipherqat
Amida
Seert
Kotchannes
Atropatene
Urmiah
Gilan
Samosata
Hah
Qartmin
Djazireh
Mardin
Zeugma
Edessa (Urfa)
Dara
Nisibis
Sultaniyeh
Dailam
Tarsus
Cilicia
Mopsuestia
Carrhae
Hazakeh
Alamut
St. Simeon
Dehez
Mabbug
Antioch
Baqirha
Aleppo
Khabur
Mar Mattai
Mosul
Arbela
Teheran
Qalliniqos (Raqqa)
Ganzak
Ray
Deir-e Gachin
Laodicea
Serjilla
Apamea
Resapha
Zenobia
Hatra
Kirkuk
Lashom
Hamadan
Homs
Palmyra
Dura Europos
Takrit
Qum
Halwan
Taq-e Bostan
Nihavand
Baalbek
Deir Mar Musa
Ma'alula
Damascus
Samarra
Bakuba
Habbaniyah
Baghdad
Seleucia-Ctesiphon
Tiberias
Bostra
Ain Jalut
Ispahan
Susa
Beit Lapat (Gondeshapur)
Karka de Ledan
al-Hira
Kashkar
Ahwaz
Jerusalem
Alexandria
Cairo
Prat de Meishan (Basra)
Schapur
Kazrun

GOLDEN HORDE
OGHUZ
HALIH
TURKISTAN
TRANSOXANIA
TABARISTAN
KHORASSAN
HEPHTALITES
QARLUQ
LAND OF SEVEN RIVERS
KARA KHITAI
ALTAI
OIRAT
KYRGYZ
NAIMAN
MERKIT
KERAIT
BORDJIGIN
(Clan of Genghis Khan)
UIGUR
XI XIA
TANGUT
TATAR
MANCHURIA
ÖNGÜT
TIBET
CHINA

Wolga
Caspian Sea
Aral-Lake
Syr-Darya (Jaxartes)
Balchasch-Lake
Chu
Talas
Issykul
Irtysh
Ob
Jenissei
Angara
Lena
Baikal-Lake
Onon
Amur
Selenga
Orchon
Amu-Darya (Oxus)
Tarim
Yellow River
Yellow Sea
Sutlej
Indus
Ganges
Brahmaputra
Irrawady
Salween
Mekong
Yangtze
Xi-jiang

Gyaur Kala, Mizdachkhan
Otrar
Taraz
Mirki
Navakat
Suyab
Balasagun
Saruu
Almalik
Urumqi
Turfan
Bulayiq
Kocho
Hami
Aqsu
Kashgar
Yarkand
Khotan
Miran
Dunhuang
Kara Khoto
Yinchüan
Ordos
Zhangye
Xining
Kara Balgasun
Karakorum
Khuk Burd Süme
Khongorin Els
Olon Sume-in Tor
Hohhot
Liaoyang
Khan Baliq
Fang Shan
Chang'an (Xian)
Luoyang
Wuchun
Yangzhou
Zhenjiang
Hangzhou
Chengdu
Mt. Omei
Fuzhou
Zaitun (Quanzhou)
Quangzhou
Gurgentsch
Bukhara
Samarqand
Merv
Nishapur
Urgut
Termez
Penjikent
Balkh
Herat
Bamyan
Ghazna
Tanktse
Lhasa
Thana
Sopara

Gulf of Oman
Gulf of Bengal

Place
Christian community
Metropolitan see
HALIH Nomadic Metropolitan see
ALTAI Peoples, nations
Trading routes (Silk roads)

0 200 400 600 800 1000 km

40 60 80 100 120 140
40 20 20
60 80 100 120